

to **TEACH**
is to touch
A *Life*
FOREVER

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*An inspiring collection of
Learning Resources
for educators*

Contents

1. A Life Worth Living	Arvind Gupta	5
2. BÂLÂ: Building as Learning Aid	Kabir Vajpeyi	7
3. The Yellow Raincoat	Matthew Belmonte	18
4. My Schools	Rabindranath Tagore	21
5. NCF 2005: Vision and Perplexities	Rohit Dhankar	28
6. Light the lamp within, Teacher	Subroto Bagchi	36
7. Active Learning, Passive Teaching	Arvind Gupta	38
8. Hole in the Wall	Dr. Sugata Mitra	41
9. Doing Their Duty	Arvind Gupta	44
10. शिक्षा में बाल साहित्य की भूमिका	कृष्ण कुमार	46
11. The Animal School: A Parable	George H. Reavis	61
12. Design for Change		63
13. Of Mice and Children	Arvind Gupta	67
14. David Horsburgh of Neelbagh		
The Story of Neelbagh	Arvind Gupta	70
Vikasana	M C Malathi	72
Where the mind is without fear	Amukta Mahapatra	75
15. Lifelong Kindergarten	Dr. Mitchell Resnick	77
16. A Day at Mirambika	Anjum Sibia	80
17. King of Children: Dr. Janusz Korczak	Arvind Gupta	86
18. Teach your children well	Abraham Lincoln	89
19. साहित्य और पढ़ना सीखना के इर्द-गिर्द कुछ बातें	सुशील शुक्ल	90
20. Nayi Talim		
My Magical School	Dr. Abhay Bang	99
A Method of Teaching Enunciated by Mahatma Gandhi	Arvind Gupta	104
New Hope	Sushma Sharma	107
21. Reading is basic to democracy	Krishna Kumar	109
22. Reggio Emilia Philosophy		112
23. A Unique Adventure in Rural Science Teaching		115
24. Learning to Say No to a System That Fails	Arti Jaiman	120
25. Maths Visionary: P. K. Srinivasan	Arvind Gupta	123
26. El Sistema		126
27. If sharks were people...	Bertolt Brecht	130
28. The Element	Ken Robinson	131
29. Day Dreams	Gijubhai Bhadeka	138
30. The Waldorf Way		141

A Life Worth Living

Arvind Gupta

Does life have an aim? I have often mulled over this question. I feel life is innately meaningless. But then it would become very unbearable. We can't live in a void. So, we have to lend our lives a meaning – even if none exists. This is what makes a life worth living.

Speaking for myself I wanted to become a primary school teacher, in a small hill town. This idyllic dream still propels me! Being good in studies I got into the IIT. And later got a good job. At heart I always wanted to work with children. So, after two years of work with Telco I took a year off to work with the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme (HSTP). I made toys and wrote books. Many children and teachers liked them and used them. This made me very happy. It gave me deep satisfaction to do something meaningful.

Over the years I have had the privilege of working in many countries with teachers and children. I have conducted workshops in over 1300 schools in my own country. These experiences made me acutely aware about the dire poverty of good reading material for teachers. There was very little worth reading, which was available at an affordable price. My response to the situation was very personal. If I liked some book very much, and if it was moderately priced I would buy 20-30 copies of it, and share it with my friends. For as long as I can remember I have bought multiple copies of books. Before email came in I wrote 30-40 postcards everyday. We had a vibrant “underground” in education. We shared our cherished books, translated them and distributed them.

Much before we were able to inspire the National Book Trust to print Tottochan, it had already been translated and printed in seven Indian languages! We did the same with several other books. The greatest Indian classic on education *Divaswapna* by Gijubhai Badheka languished for full 60 years before we made it mainstream. This speaks so much of our gargantuan educational institutions! *Danger School!* by Paulo Friere's group, *Teacher* – Sylvia Ashton Warner, *Duishen* – Chinzees Aitmatov, *Summerhill* – A. S. Neill, *VSO Science and Maths Handbooks for Teachers*, several books by John Holt, *UNESCO Source Book for Science in the Primary School*, *Gayneck* – Dhangopal Mukerjee (the only book by an Indian author ever to have won the prestigious Newbery Medal) *Exasperating Essays* – D.D.Kosambi, *School of Barbiana*, *Bahuroop Gandhi* – Anu Bandopadhyaya and printing of scores of other books not for personal profit but for public gain is testimony to what ordinary focussed citizens can do.

My needs are simple. Expensive clothes look cheap on me! I scarcely eat anything when I am invited for a party I crave for the home cooked “khichidi”. For twenty years I have not been to the barber. Every month or two, my wife “chops” the few strands of hair that have dared to grow long. My daughter has been stitching my pyjamas for as long as I can remember. Out of love or ignorance, people often shower fraudulent titles like Dr., Professor, Director on me. I am none of these. I have never had a visiting card. I don't need all these appendages for my personal identity. My deeply satisfying work sustains me. Seeing the gleam in the eyes of children everyday recharges me. Good, meaningful work propels me.

A Life Worth Living

Money, status and power don't mean much to me. I am not in competition with anyone – but with myself. Every single day I translate for 4 hours so that I can share something meaningful with 40 crore Hindi speaking people. Because I have been on the roads all my life is one single reason why I have been able to reach out to so many people, from all walks of life.

There are many positive role models. On the Internet there is a site named [gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org) (Gutenberg is the place where the first bible was printed on a printing press). A digital visionary - Michael Hart, inspired it. Today there is enough computing power in the world to digitise each and every single book, in each and every language in the world and put it on the web. All the books of the world can be made available to all the children—whether rich or poor, at the

click of the mouse. Gutenberg has a very simple slogan “A MILLION BOOKS FOR A BILLION PEOPLE”. What an inspiring slogan! It stirred me. In the last eight months I have digitised over 130 books (in English, Marathi and Hindi) and uploaded them on my site <http://arvindguptatoys.com>

Gutenberg has digitised over 15,000 books and placed them in the public domain. We need to do the same with books in Indian languages. We can do it, as Indians are great at assimilating technology. Our children are starved of books. Our libraries are non-existent and antiquated. We can do meaningful things by placing every possible piece of literature in our languages on the web. I often think why Gandhi would have really loved the Internet. I will end by a small quote from Gandhi: ‘Live simply so that others may simply live.’

Arvind Gupta is an Indian toy inventor and populariser of science. An alumnus of IIT Kanpur, he has won many awards for making science fun for children. The mission of reaching books to each and every child in the country is close to his heart. In addition to authoring numerous books on activity based learning, he has also translated numerous seminal works into Hindi. Arvind Gupta's TED Talk: Turning Trash into Toys for Learning is amongst the best TED Talks on Education. He shares his passion for science and books through his popular website www.arvindguptatoys.com.

BÂLÂ: Building as Learning Aid

Kabir Vajpeyi

The concept of using built environment as learning aid (bâlâ) emerged during 1996-98 when Vinyās, an architectural research and design group, was working in 60 rural schools under the Lok Jumbish educational programme in Rajasthan, India. Subsequently, Vinyās envisaged an interdisciplinary research project in 2000, supported by Unicef India. While Keerti Jayaram and Vini Chandra, education and child development professionals developed the educational component, Vinyās (Preeti and Kabir Vajpeyi) and architect Dhruv Kulshrestha designed the architectural component.

Physical environment of a school plays a large role in determining the quality of learning and teaching taking place there, in kindling curiosity and imagination of children and in teaching them how to live and interact together. Building as Learning Aid (bâlâ) is an initiative to focus on the needs of children, teachers and the community within school and suggest a large number of design-ideas and ways in which the building of schools, their physical environment could not only become more congenial, sensitive and helpful but also contribute meaningfully towards learning and pedagogy.

The school building must offer an additional 'learning value' to its inhabitants. If we can make ingenious use of the school spaces (classroom, circulation spaces, outdoors, natural environment) and its constituent elements (built: floors, walls, ceilings, doors, windows, furniture, open ground as well as non-built: lighting and ventilation), then the school structure can indeed support diverse learning activities apart from conventional teaching. It is therefore important to pay attention to the interface between the design of the building and the teaching-learning programme. This 'learning value' can complement the teaching process and supplement textbook information.

A three-dimensional space can offer a unique setting for a child to learn because it can introduce a multiple sensory experience into the otherwise B&W world of textbooks and blackboards. It can make abstract concepts more real for the child. It has the potential to create conducive self-learning situations for children. Dimensions, textures, shapes, angles and movement can be used to communicate some basic concepts of language, science, mathematics and environment, and to make learning a truly memorable experience for children. Bâlâ ideas are not standard; teachers can tailor them to suit their specifications. Even though fixed, the aids can be used in multiple ways.

Design Characteristics

Bâlâ designs take a few essential principles into account in all instances. Foremost, any design idea must be an organic part of the building environment—it must primarily perform the function it has been made for and it can subsequently double up as a learning aid—and not the other way round! Design ideas explore and utilize the uniqueness of three-dimensional space, thereby generating concrete experiences related to scaling of measures & dimensions, identification of landmarks and understanding of spatial concepts. Since

BÂLÂ: Building as Learning Aid

design ideas are to be permanent fixtures of the school building, they are planned such that they can be used in multiple ways—different children may use them differently at different times. Design ideas address the core learning areas and can thus be utilized across different grades and even across different curricula to create conducive literacy environment. The numerous design ideas spread across a school provide multiple sensory perceptions and cater to the horizontal elaboration of concepts, i.e. one concept explained through many approaches. This is because different children learn the same thing through different modes and at a different pace. Bâlâ designs are created for settings that make them easily accessible to children and use the natural characteristic of the space. They offer a choice of variation which the school can select based on its context and address the diversity in the backgrounds of the children and their communities. Cultural and ethnic motifs and visuals are incorporated into the designs to introduce children to our diverse national heritage. The most important and integral feature of Bâlâ designs is to promote fun and joy in the learning process.

Meaningful progress can be achieved with interventions in the physical, cognitive, institutional and social domains

of an educational system, preferably simultaneously. Bâlâ designs focus on the physical domains, with the assumption that stakeholders will understand its implications in the other domains and take coordinated action suitable in their context from a holistic point of view. A school, however good, cannot be effective unless the teachers are on board with the ethos behind children's learning styles as applied in Bâlâ designs. Hence, it is important for them to have a sense of ownership and efforts may be needed to sensitise them. Similarly, if the community is not aware or appreciative of joyful learning, it will want the school to enforce conventional methodology, which would pose hurdles in the way towards innovation.

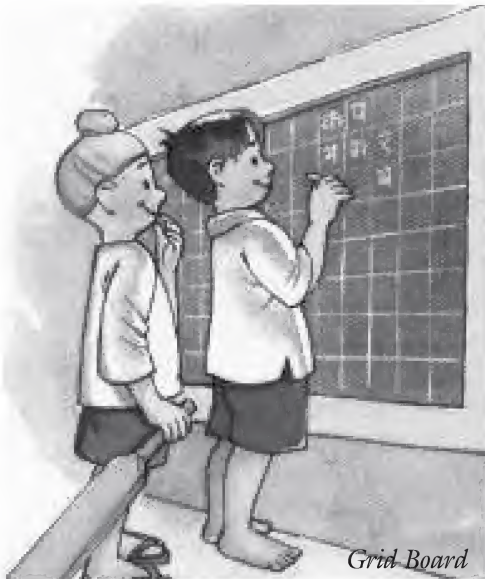
The complex process of reading, writing and constructing meaning can be fostered in schools only when the environment allows for mistakes and encourages children to read and write freely and share their experiences or fantasies in meaningful ways. Several Bâlâ designs provide for numerous writing and display surfaces, and labelling of objects and spaces, which stimulate language and create an environment conducive for learning. These can also be used to teach and learn different subjects across different grades.

Bâlâ Design Ideas

Wall Boards

Wall boards provide spaces for open-ended conceptual and creative experiences for children. These provide visual guidance and freedom of use by children whereby facilitating multifaceted learning in languages, art, geometry, numeracy, and the like. Word walls foster building word power and comprehending sentence structure and syntax of languages.





Grid Board

Grid Boards

These may be used for interactive and creative, teacher-directed or independent activities in maths, languages, mapping art and skill development.



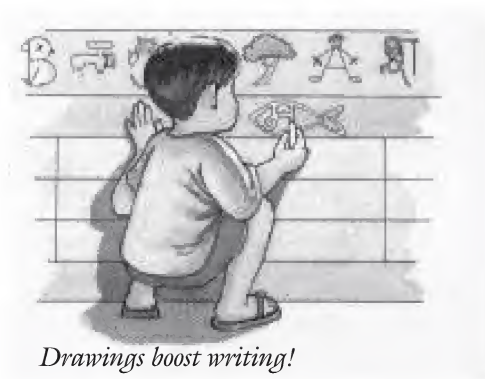
Dot Board

Dot Boards

Writing surfaces interspersed with dots and regular intervals are a versatile design idea to teach drawing patterns, geometrical shapes, alphabet formations, symbol and figure outlines and plotting the graphs.

Alphabet Shape Boards

A special type of chalkboard with two parts – a border with painted pictures & a ruled or plain writing surface. These aid in intellectual stimulation, letter recognition and drawing lessons. Shape boards can vary from simple to complex, familiar to unfamiliar, near to far, and concrete to abstract in relation to the growth changes of children in their social, emotional and intellectual domains.



Drawings boost writing!



Alphabet Shapes

BÂLÂ: Building as Learning Aid

Grooved Writing Patterns

Grooves on walls help children to trace and strengthen their finger muscles and wrist movements. Outlining alphabet patterns (using their finger or chalk or pencil) can help correct hand movement for improving letter formation. Furthermore, traditional cultural motifs engraved into the walls may in addition to enhancing the visual appeal may offer excellent tool for practising fine motor skills. Grooved patterns are good learning material for the visually challenged children as well.



Classroom Wall Calendar with Clock



The complexity of the passage of time—over the day and through the months—can be made easier to understand by getting children to actively interact with a calendar and relate it to their daily experience. The physical accessibility of the calendar increases possibilities for children to comprehend this abstract and varied topic in interesting ways.

Door Angle Protractor

Surest way to bring geometry out of textbooks!





Height Chart on Wall

Etched Measurement Scales

To inculcate the sense of measurement and estimation, marking the dimensions of the built environment (length-breadth-height of classrooms, corridors and furniture, the capacity of water tank and the weight of desk-chairs-tables) can help develop this sense in a tangible way. With a measurement scale painted in the space around them, they can even measure themselves or the objects they use frequently.



Fraction tiles on walls & floors

Fraction Aids

The built space offers several opportunities of representing the concept of 'whole' and its 'parts' or fractions. Be it tiles on the walls or floors, sections of a grill on windows, sectors of a circle on the ground, fractions can be experienced in several real ways.



Tangram Tiles

Innovative tiles on floors and walls are an innovative use of waste square tiles to create visual stimulus. Tangram Tiles allow puzzles to reveal themselves readily to children and teachers in the physical space around them. Tangram frees geometrical shapes and their



Window Grill Fractions

BÂLÂ: Building as Learning Aid

property to combine with others from the conventional norm into a world of creativity.

Revolving around the pole and understanding a cyclic phenomenon

Children absolutely love going around any round column. If concepts that are based on spiral line, like planetary motion or lunar cycles or metamorphosis, are drawn on the curved surfaces of poles, such pictorial depiction on a continuous, curvilinear surface can make it easier for children to visualise and understand the abstract concept.



Cyclic phenomena on pillars

Moving furniture and finding its weight in the bargain

Children are thrilled about pottering furniture, especially the one that belongs to school! Why not paint the weight of the table on it? This will help children develop a sense of how heavy an object can they lift and also how much is 8 kg or 20 kg!



Lift to learn!

Hiding & Peeping/ Jaali Walls

Hiding & Peeping Walls boost flexibility and reflex.



Hiding & Peeping Wall

Intricately designed brick Jaali Walls not only promote ventilation but also create interesting visual play of sunlight and shadows.



Jaali Wall



Magic mirrors!

Fun Mirrors

Mirrors made of acrylic or polycarbonate sheets go a long way in teaching concepts of optics—image inversion, reflection—they also have immense potential as an educational toy!

Mapping the World around



School Map in the Premises

An outline map of the classroom on teacher's table or classroom floor introduces children to a map by linking it to their immediate surroundings. A large outdoor floor map of the school allows children of different grades to observe places, objects, routes and trees around and locate them on the map. A activity brick-map of a state/country having boundary lined with bricks and filled with sand/mud helps children playfully explore the features of a map by creating their own geographical and manmade features—mountains, valley, river, railways road, houses—in doing so they learn contouring and understand

BÂLÂ: Building as Learning Aid

the N-S-E-W directions. Ceramic tiles with engraved map outlines fixed on classroom window panes can help students transfer the shapes on to paper by pressing or rubbing it against the engraved lines on the tiles. Such tracing tiles could be used for outlines of money, geometrical shapes, alphabets or numbers, leaf shapes, tangrams, etc. and serve as accessible, dependable and low-cost duplicating medium available within the school.

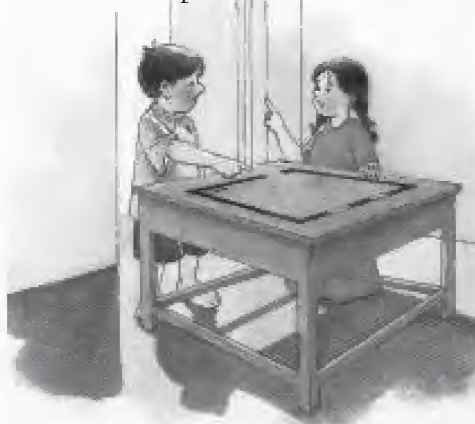


Brick Map of India



Mud & Sand Play Area

Classroom Map on the Teacher's Table



Tile for tracing India's outline map

Activity Space to play with mud and sand

An area where children can get their feet and hands in the mud, freely explore sand, water and other natural materials. The concrete experience thus generated is likely to be more lasting than mere textbook information.

Counter window with amphitheatre for simulating life situations



Make-believe and pretend-play allows children to behave 'as the adults do' and inadvertently prepare for future roles in a fun manner. It can serve as site for informal teaching sessions that can lend itself to multiple uses and activities. Cubby holes can serve as shopping shelves and tracing tiles may help children generate their own money and tickets. The blackboard can be used to explain the maths behind the transaction at the counter. A bell near the counter can help call attention during the activity. The amphitheatre improves the versatility of the space.



Outdoor Play Area

Sand and tyre parks based on James Jolley's designs presented in his book 'EnTYREly Fun Parks' create multifaceted learning environments for children as young as pre-primary levels.

BÂLÂ: Building as Learning Aid

Sundial in Open Space for understanding the notion of time

Sundials are an interesting way to visually perceive the passage of time with the movement of shadows on the ground, wall or ceiling. Constructing different kinds of sundials can help teachers explain the unique positions of the sun through the day and through the year in a practical manner.

Sundial



Planetary Orbits on the Ground



Planet paths on the ground!

This design idea uses the natural inclination of children to move around flagpoles by drawing eight concentric orbits around a pole and dividing the orbits into four quadrants to represent the four seasons. The quadrants are further divided into three to create total 12 sectors for representing the months of the year. In using this, children act as planets and move along the orbit. Through the actual movement of their own bodies, children can experience both rotation and revolution. The three-dimensional interaction of children (as planets) with the pole (as the sun) becomes an experimental base for children to relate to while studying the more advanced ideas of planetary movements in their textbooks.

Enhancing rainwater harvesting

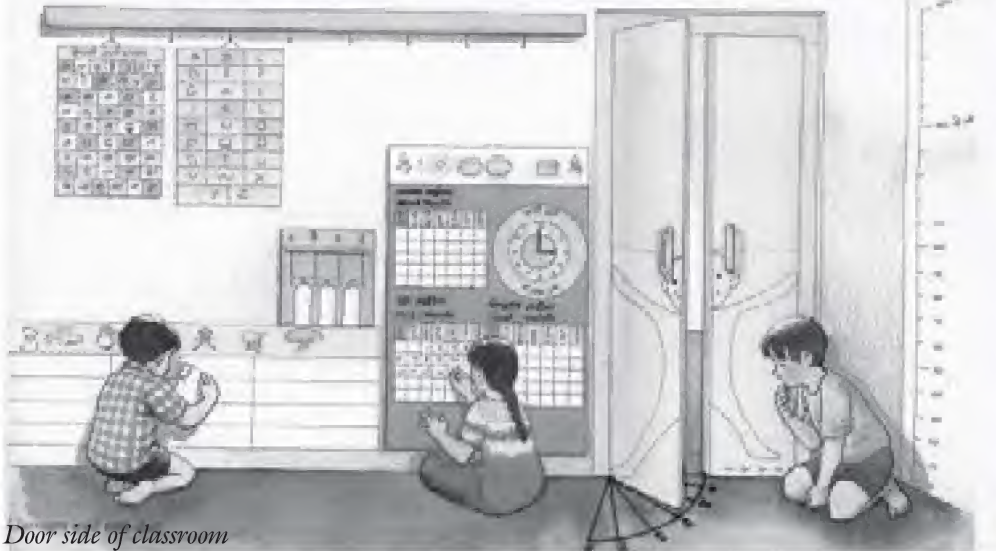


Corridor Spaces



Assorted designs for hallway

Classroom Spaces

*Chalkboard side of classroom**Door side of classroom*

School is not about edifices and physical spaces alone. It is about a learning environment that needs to be conceived in a holistic manner and delivered in a way that is best suited to its users. The physical environment is an intrinsic part of this process. Since

buildings are the most expensive physical assets of a school, effort should be made to derive the maximum educational value from them. And Bâlâ is just one suggestion on the way forward for modifying school structures to make education child centric.

Download link for the original work <http://www.arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/bala.pdf>

The Yellow Raincoat

Matthew Belmonte

We think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with



Even in primary school I was preoccupied with the idea of protection from an unpredictable world. Protection often came in the form of a glaringly bright, yellow raincoat that kept me dry on rainy days on my way to school. A thoroughly synthetic creation made of rubberized polyester, it would have been difficult to imagine anything less natural. It would be difficult to imagine an artefact that more embodies the tension between myself and my environment. More than its function of keeping rain out, however, it represented my fear of letting anything in—people most of all.

People were the most unpredictable elements of my world; unlike the other objects they were more than the sum of the forces acting on them. The human factor was a constant irritant for a budding Laplacian like me. Where a person was involved, one could never be assured of predicting the output, even if all the inputs were known. My wish back then was that I could be the human analog of the neutrino I had read about in science articles: a particle that moved effortlessly through the world, almost never interacting. On the playground, while the other three-year-olds competed for the swings and the slide, I paced along the fence, studying the ground and identifying minerals in the rocks that I found. Rocks, unlike people, were safe.

Wrapped around and covering me, the raincoat represented my mother's triumph over my own will, and persistently reminded me of my dependence on her. In a fundamental way that I didn't consciously acknowledge, the coat came to represent my mother, and I loved and resented it as I loved and resented her. A fear of death, of being smothered and negated, drives us to separate ourselves from our parents. And a fear of life, of being responsible for ourselves in an indifferent world, brings us back to seek their protection. These conflicting denials of death and of life were attached to the coat: it made me impermeable to the assaults of the outside world, yet it defined me in a way that prevented me from being myself.

In solitude I slipped between the horns of this dilemma. When I was alone, there was neither the threat of attention from other people, nor the demand to submit to the decisions of my parents. The defeat of my will that was signalled by the yellow coat could be replayed as a victory, if I were the one who chose it. Walking alone through a downpour, I was immersed in the outside world's flood yet insulated from it. It was thrilling to feel the pressure of the rain and to see it roll off me and leave me dry. It was as if I were marvelling at some alien world and knew that a spacesuit was all that separated me from its deadly atmosphere. Alone in the rain, I was master of my own actions and of my surroundings.

I believe that my childhood sensitivity to the boundary between self and external world led me in my adult life to study people with autism, whose central, daily challenge is the work of imposing internal narrative flow on a deluge of external sensory inputs. Ironically, when I was in primary school I never felt much empathy for my autistic older brother. Now as I look back I see both science and autism

are compulsions to order, which differ only in their degrees of abstraction. I now feel that the same set of genetic biases that gave my brother autism gave me just enough of a desperation for order to make me a scientist, and indeed, a student of autism—enough to be driven by the same sense of impending chaos that drives my brother, yet I'm not as overwhelmed by it. I often consider how similar he and I are, and how I so easily could have been him, or he me.

So it was this shared desperation for order that drove me into science, and later into the craft of fiction.

Like my old raincoat, science and art enable me to immerse myself in nature's order while they insulate me from nature's chaos. As scientists we invent perfect models in which phenomena are supposed to be mathematically tractable; the human construction of science is full of ideal gases, incompressible fluids, frictionless surfaces, and blackbody radiators. Similarly, as artists we filter the complexities of real life into representative texts in which distinct characters are involved in coherent plots evincing meaningful themes. Treating life as theatre and inventing purpose and order, I keep chaos, meaninglessness, and death at bay. My theoretical and narrative constructions in science and art are the same sort of protective gear as the impermeable coat that I once wore to primary school; they hold nature at arm's length, close enough so that I can make some sense of it, but far enough so that I won't be overwhelmed.

My work has taught me that this notion of protection goes a long way toward explaining how people construct theories to gain a sense of control over their surroundings. Then they behave in ways to reinforce these theories. People with autism share the "normal" desire to

The Yellow Raincoat



control their surroundings. What differs for them is the intensity with which these surroundings impinge. Abnormal neural connections within autistic brains may lead to abnormal perception, increasing the salience of individual events but undermining the ability to connect these pieces of life into more integrated and abstract representations.

I made understanding the experience of such a fragmented perceptual world

the centre of my work. To proceed, I imagine life as a film being screened by an incompetent projectionist. Perhaps the volume is so high that none of the dialogue can be heard above the hiss of noise, or perhaps the aperture setting causes one bright corner of the picture to drown out all the rest. However, if I can rewind the film and play it again and again, I can gather a bit more information each time I watch it. My aspiration is to understand all of it.

The rigid and repetitive behaviours of people with autism begin to make sense when we consider them as the normal reaction of a human mind to a very abnormal sensory environment, rather than as direct symptoms of an illness. Autistic symptoms are what a person does in order to force a chaotic world to follow a predictable script. We are all trying to impose a narrative order on what may seem a fundamentally chaotic world. The difference in autism is that there is more chaos to be controlled. In this regard, the study of autism can tell us a great deal about humanity in general and how psychological distress can be explained as a rational, if extreme, reaction to a world gone awry.

On a stereotypically rainy English day, I still enjoy a ramble through the countryside. Trudging through the rain helps me collect my thoughts about science and life. As I squelch along footpaths, I consider that each raindrop is an observation in itself, and I marvel at the task of comprehending the storm without drowning in it.

Matthew Belmonte studied the neurobiology of autism at the University of Cambridge and is now at Cornell University in the Department of Human Development.

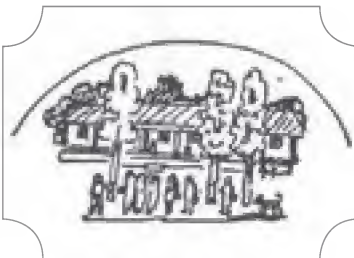
This essay forms a part of the book 'Evocative Objects – Things We Think with' curated by Sherry Turkle and published by MIT Press in 2007. This deeply moving anthology features writings from thirty-four scientists, humanists, artists, and designers that put objects and their human relations front and center.

My Schools

Rabindranath Tagore

THE SCHOOL TAGORE FOUND

I started a school in Bengal when I was nearing forty. Certainly this was never expected of me, who had spent the greater portion of my life in writing, chiefly verses. Therefore people naturally thought that as a school it might not be one of the best of its kind, but it was sure to be something outrageously new, being the product of daring inexperience. This is one of the reasons why I am often asked about the idea upon which my school is based. The question is a very embarrassing one for me, because to satisfy the expectation of my questioners, I cannot afford to be commonplace in my answer. However, I shall resist the temptation to be original and shall be content with being merely truthful.



them, body and soul. It is their first introduction to the great truth that man's true relationship with the world is that of personal love and not that of the mechanical law of causation. The young mind should be saturated with the idea that it has been born in a human world which is in harmony with the world around it. And this is what our regular type of school ignores with an air of superior wisdom, severe and disdainful. It is a mere method of discipline which refuses to take into account the individual. It is a manufactory specially designed for grinding out uniform results. It follows an imaginary straight line of the average in digging its channel of education. But life's line is not the straight line, for it is fond of playing the see-saw with the line of the average, bringing upon its head the rebuke of the school.

I must confess it is difficult for me to explain the idea which underlies my institution. For, the idea is not like a fixed foundation upon which a building is erected. It is more like a seed which cannot be separated and pointed out directly from the plant it begins to grow into. And I know what it was to which this school owes its origin. It was not any new theory of education, but the memory of my schooldays. That those days were unhappy ones for me, I cannot altogether ascribe to my peculiar temperament or to any special demerit of the schools to which I was sent.

The provision has been made for infants to be fed upon their mother's milk. They find their food and their mother at the same time. It is complete nourishment for

Legend has it that eating of the fruit of knowledge is not consonant with dwelling in paradise. Therefore men's children have to be banished from their paradise into a realm of death, dominated by the decency of a tailoring department. So my mind had to accept the tight-fitting encasement of the school which, being like the shoes of a mandarin woman, pinched and bruised my nature on all sides and at every movement. I was fortunate enough in extricating myself before insensibility set in. Though I did not have to serve the full penal term which men of my position have to undergo to find their entrance into cultured society, I am glad that I did not altogether escape from its molestation. For

My Schools

it has given me knowledge of the wrong from which the children of men suffer. The cause of this is that man's intention is going against God's intention as to how children should grow into knowledge. How we should conduct our business is our own affair, and therefore in our offices we are free to create in the measure of our special purposes. But such office arrangement does not suit God's creation. And children are God's own creation.

The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence. But we find that this education of sympathy is not only systematically ignored in schools, but it is severely repressed. From our very childhood, habits are formed and knowledge is imparted in such a manner that our life is weaned away from nature, and our mind and the world are set in opposition from the beginning of our days. We rob the child of his earth to teach him geography of language to teach him grammar. His hunger is for the Epic, but he is supplied with chronicles of facts and dates. Child-nature protests against such calamity with all its power of suffering, subdued at last into silence by punishment.

We all know children are lovers of the dust; their whole body and mind thirst for sunlight and air as flowers do. They are never in a mood to refuse the constant invitations to establish direct communication which come to their senses from the universe. But unfortunately for children their parents, in the pursuit of their profession, in conformity to their social traditions, live in their own peculiar world of habits. Much of this cannot be helped. But our childhood is the period when we ought to have more freedom—freedom from the necessity of specialization into the narrow bounds of social and professional conventionalism.

I well remember the surprise and annoyance of an experienced headmaster, reputed to be a successful disciplinarian, when he saw one of the boys of my school climbing a tree and choosing a fork of the branches for settling down to his studies. I had to say to him in explanation that 'childhood is the only period of life when a civilized man can exercise his choice between the branches of a tree and his drawing-room chair, and should I deprive this boy of that privilege because I, as a grown-up man, am barred from it?' What is surprising is to notice the same headmaster's approval of the boys' studying botany. He believes in an impersonal knowledge of the tree because that is science, but not in a personal experience of it. This growth of experience leads to forming instinct, which is the result of nature's own method of instruction.

The boys of my school have acquired instinctive knowledge of the physiognomy of the tree. By the least touch they know where they can find a foothold upon an apparently inhospitable trunk; they know how far they can take liberty with the branches, how to distribute their bodies' weight so as to make themselves least burdensome to branchlets. My boys are able to make the best possible use of the tree in the matter of gathering fruits, taking rest and hiding from undesirable pursuers. I myself was brought up in a cultured home in a town, and as far as my personal behaviour goes, I have been obliged to act all through my life as if I were born in a world where there are no trees. Therefore I consider it as a part of education for my boys to let them fully realize that they are in a scheme of existence where trees are a substantial fact, not merely as generating chlorophyll and taking carbon from the air, but as living trees.

Naturally the soles of our feet are so made that they become the best instruments

for us to stand upon the earth and to walk with. From the day we commenced to wear shoes we minimized the purpose of our feet. With the lessening of their responsibility they have lost their dignity, and now they lend themselves to be pampered with socks, slippers and shoes of all prices and shapes and misproportions. For us it amounts to a grievance against God for not giving us hooves instead of beautifully sensitive soles. I am not for banishing footgear altogether from men's use. But I have no hesitation in asserting that the soles of children's feet should not be deprived of their education, provided for them by nature, free of cost. Of all the limbs we have, they are the best adapted for intimately knowing the earth by their touch.

I have again to confess that I was brought up in a respectable household, and my feet from childhood have been carefully saved from all naked contact with the dust. When I try to emulate my boys in walking barefoot, I painfully realize what thickness of ignorance about the earth I carry under my feet. I invariably choose the thorns to tread upon in such a manner as to make the thorns exult. My feet have not the instinct to follow the lines of least resistance. For even the flattest of earth-surface has its dimples of diminutive hills and dales only noticeable by educated feet. I know that in the practical world shoes will be worn, roads will be metalled, cars will be used, but during their period of education, should children not be given to know that the world is not all drawing-room, that there is such a thing as nature to which their limbs are made beautifully to respond?

There are men who think that by the simplicity of living, introduced in my school, I preach the idealization of poverty which prevailed in the mediaeval age. From the point of view of education, should we not admit that poverty is the school in

which man had his first lessons and his best training? Even a millionNayir's son has to be born helplessly poor and to begin his lesson of life from the beginning. He has to learn to walk like the poorest of children, though he has means to afford to be without the appendage of legs. Poverty brings us into complete touch with life and the world, for living richly is living mostly by proxy, and thus living in a world of lesser reality. This may be good for one's pleasure and pride, but not for one's education. Therefore in my school, much to the disgust of the people of expensive habits, I had to provide for this great teacher — this bareness of furniture and materials — not because it is poverty, but because it leads to personal experience of the world.

What tortured me in my school-days was the fact that the school had not the completeness of the world. It was a special arrangement for giving lessons. Children are in love with life, and it is their first love. And are we quite sure of our wisdom in stifling this love? Children are not born ascetics, fit to enter at once into the monastic discipline of acquiring knowledge. At first they must gather knowledge through their life, and then they will renounce their lives to gain knowledge, and then again they will come back to their fuller lives with ripened wisdom.

But society has made its own arrangements for manipulating men's minds to fit its special patterns. There are grave penalties for one who ventures to take liberty with some part of the arrangements, even to save his soul. Therefore it is one thing to realize truth and another to bring it into practice where the whole current of the prevailing system goes against you. This is why, when I had to face the problem of my own son's education, I was at a loss to give it a practical solution. The first thing that I did was to take him away from the

My Schools

town surroundings into a village and allow him the freedom of primeval nature. He had a river, noted for its danger, where he swam and rowed without check from the anxiety of his elders. He spent his time in the fields and on the trackless sand-banks, coming late for his meals without being questioned. He had none of those luxuries that are not only customary but are held as proper for boys of his circumstance. For which privations, I am sure, he was pitied and his parents blamed by people. But I was certain that luxuries are the burdens to boys, the burdens of the vicarious pride and pleasure which parents enjoy through their children.

Yet, being an individual of limited resources, I could do very little for my son in the way of educating him according to my plan. But he had freedom of movement: he had very few of the screens of wealth and respectability between himself and the world of nature. Thus he had a better opportunity for a real experience of this universe than I ever had. The object of education is to give man the unity of truth. Formerly, when life was simple, all the different elements of man were in complete harmony. But when there came the separation of the intellect from the spiritual and the physical, the school education put entire emphasis on the intellect and the physical side of man. We devote our sole attention to giving children information, not knowing that by this emphasis we are accentuating a break between the intellectual, physical and the spiritual life.

I believe in a spiritual world, not as anything separate from this world, but as its innermost truth. Experience of this spiritual world, whose reality we miss by our incessant habit of ignoring it from childhood, has to be gained by children by fully living in it and not through the medium of theological instruction. But

how this is to be done is a problem difficult of solution in the present age. For nowadays men have managed so fully to occupy their time that they do not find leisure to know that their activities have only movement but very little truth, that their soul has not found its world.

In India we still cherish in our memory the tradition of the forest colonies of great teachers. These places were neither schools nor monasteries in the modern sense of the word. They consisted of homes where with their families lived men whose object was to see the world in God. Though they lived outside society, yet they were to society what the sun is to the planets, the centre from which it received its life and light. And here boys grew up in an intimate vision of eternal life before they were thought fit to enter the state of the householder. In the ancient India the school was where was the life itself was and students were brought up, not in the academic atmosphere of scholarship and learning, but in the atmosphere of living aspiration. They took the cattle to pasture, collected firewood, gathered fruit, cultivated kindness towards all creatures, and grew in their spirit with their own teachers' spiritual growth.

That this traditional relationship of the masters and disciples is not a mere romantic fiction is proved by the fact we still possess of the indigenous system of education. *Chaluspalthis*, which is the Sanskrit name for the university, had not the savour of the school about them. The students lived in their master's home without having to pay for their board and lodging or tuition. The teacher prosecuted his own study, helping the students in their lessons as a part of his life and not of his profession. This ideal of education through sharing a life of high aspiration with one's master took possession of my mind. In India we have the inheritance of

this treasure of spiritual wisdom. Let the object of our education be nothing short of the highest purpose of man, the fullest growth and freedom of soul.

I had been immersed in literary activities when this thought struck my mind with painful intensity. I suddenly felt like one groaning under the suffocation of nightmare. It was not only my own soul, but the soul of my country that seemed to be struggling for its breath through me. I felt clearly that what was needed was not any particular material object, not wealth or comfort or power, but our awakening to full consciousness in soul freedom, the freedom of the life in God, where we have no enmity with those who must fight, no competition with those who must make money, where we are beyond all attacks and above all insults.

In conclusion, I warn my hearers not to carry away with them any false or exaggerated picture of this ashram. When ideas are stated in a paper, they appear too simple and complete. But in reality their manifestation through the materials that are living and varied and ever changing is not so clear and perfect. We have obstacles in human nature and in outer circumstances. We pass through dark periods of doubt and reaction. But these conflicts and waverings belong to the true aspects of reality.

Living ideals can never be set into a clockwork arrangement, giving accurate account of its every second. I for my part believe in the principle of life, in the soul of man, more than in methods. I believe that the object of education is the freedom of mind which can only be achieved through the path of freedom--though freedom has its risk and responsibility as life itself has. I know it for certain, though most people seem to have forgotten it, that children are living beings — more living than grown-up people, who have built their shells of habit around them. Therefore it is absolutely necessary for their mental health and development that they should not have mere schools for their lessons, but a world whose guiding spirit is personal love.

It must be an ashram where men have gathered for the highest end of life, in the peace of nature; where life is not merely meditative, but fully awake in its activities; where boys' minds are not being perpetually drilled into believing that the ideal of the self-idolatry of the nation is the truest ideal for them to accept; where the sunrise and sunset and the silent glory of stars are not daily ignored; where nature's festivities of flowers and fruit have their joyous recognition from man; and where the young and the old, the teacher and the student, sit at the same table to partake of their daily food and the food of their eternal life.

*Excerpts from a lecture delivered in America; published in Personality London: MacMillan, 1933
Original work may be sourced from www.arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/tagorememory.pdf*

My Schools

THE SCHOOLING TAGORE LOST

Perhaps you know the facts, or shall I make a confession? When I was thirteen, I finished going to school. I do not want to boast about it, I merely give it to you as a historical fact.



neither its spelling, nor its syntax, is perfectly rational. The penalty for this I had to pay, without having done anything to deserve it, with the exception of being born ignorant.

So long as I was forced to do so, I felt the torture of going to school unsupportable. I often used to count the years that must pass before I should find my freedom. My elder brothers—how I used to envy them, when, after a hurried meal in the morning, I found the inevitable carriage, that took us to school, ready at the gate. How I wished that, by some magic spell, I could cross the intervening fifteen or twenty years and become a grown-up man! I later realised that what then weighed on my mind was the unnatural pressure of the system of education, which prevailed everywhere.

I rebelled, young as I was. Of course this was an awful thing for a child to do—the child of a respectable family! My elders did not know how to deal with this phenomenon. They tried all kinds of persuasion, vigorous and gentle, until at last I was despairing of and set free. Through the joy of my freedom, I felt a real urging to teach myself. I undertook the task of playing schoolmaster to myself, and found it to be a delightful game. I pored over any books that came my way, not school-selected text-books that I did not understand, and I filled up the gaps of understanding out of my own imagination. The result may have been quite different from the author's meaning, but the activity itself had its own special value.

At the age of twelve, I was first coerced into learning English. You will admit that

When in the evening time my English teacher used to come, with what repudiation I waited! I would be yearning to go to my mother and ask her to tell me a fairy story, but instead I had to go and get my text-book, with its unpossessing black binding, and chapters of lessons, followed by rows of separated syllables with accent marks like soldier's bayonets. As for the teacher, I can never forgive him. He so inordinately conscientious! He insisted on coming every single evening, there never seemed to be either illness or death in his family. He was so preposterously punctual too. I remember how the fascination for the frightful attracted me every evening to the terrace facing the road; and just at the right moment, his umbrella, for bad weather never prevented him coming, would appear at the bend of our lane.

One day I discovered, in a library belonging to one of my brothers, a copy of Dickens' *Old Curiosity Shop*. I persisted in reading it, and, with the help of the illustrations supplemented by contributions made by my own imagination, I made out some kind of a story. In this manner, with no help from any teacher, but just as a child learns from sheer guessing, I went on reading.

In our childhood we imbibe our lessons with the aid of our whole body and mind, with all the senses fully active and eager. When we are sent to school, the doors of natural information are closed to us:

our eyes see the letters, our ears hear the abstract lessons, not the perpetual stream of ideas which form the heart of nature, because the teachers in their wisdom think that these bring distraction, that they have no great purpose behind them.

Children should be surrounded with the things of Nature, which have their

own educational value. Their minds should be allowed to stumble on and be surprised at everything that happens in the life today. The new tomorrow will stimulate their attention with the new facts of life. This is the best method for the child. A method of education that builds up the spiritual unity of all nations and races.

Excerpts from a lecture delivered in May 1925

Original work may be sourced from birbhum.gov.in/DPSC/reference/MySchool.pdf

NCF 2005: Vision and Perplexities

Rohit Dhankar

I feel privileged to talk to this audience about education, because in the last few days, I have seen their passion and concern for education. I am going to talk about the National Curriculum 2005 and some of its critiques. There is often confusion between a curriculum and a curriculum framework. Whenever we talk about curriculum, we talk about curriculum framework and vice versa. These terms are by no means fixed. They are quite flexible and people use them in different discourses in different manner. So, I have to explain how I am using these terms in this discourse. Curriculum, to me, is a plan to achieve educational aims. If we go by what Ralph Taylor said and there are many critics of Ralph Taylor who say—perhaps I am going back about half a century—curriculum seeks to answer at least four questions:

What educational purpose should the school seek to achieve? One example would be to make all people loyal to the state or the King. Or make all people believe in God. They may sound very strange today. But, both have been the educational aims of significant systems in the past that still continue today in many parts of the world. It could also be to make all people socially useful productive units. This has been one of the most significant aims in 1991, when we saw the document MLLs (Minimum Levels of Learning). You can also have an aim of making all people independent thinkers and actors which is an aim of the present national curriculum framework. So, this is one question the curriculum should answer.

What educational experiences should be provided to children to achieve these purposes?

This simply means what should be the syllabus? What kind of subjects, what is the scope of those subjects and what kind of exploratory experiences we should give to children?

How can these educational experiences be meaningfully organized in a school? This is pedagogy. What kind of pedagogy do we use?

How do we ensure that these educational purposes are indeed achieving the objectives we set in the beginning, that is, the educational aims? In order words, what sort of evaluation/assessment is to be deployed?

So, according to this definition of curriculum, it should seek answers to atleast four questions; about the aims, syllabus, pedagogy and evaluation. Evaluation, in this definition, is tied to the aims and not either to the content or the pedagogy. That is one way of looking at the curriculum. Now, if this is curriculum, what is curriculum framework?

A broad framework of basic principles, defined broadly which helps teachers and planners to formulate answers to these questions - that is the document which could probably be called a curriculum framework.

Curriculum framework is not supposed to give detailed answers to each of these questions, but rather to give an outline of principles within which people can seek answers to these questions in their own contextual situations. So, these are the ways in which I will be using these two terms.

Importance of a National Curriculum Framework

In India, as we all know, states can have their own curriculum framework, they can have their own syllabus, their own textbooks etc. There is a lot of freedom to the states in this sense. So, what is the significance of having a national curriculum framework in India? This is not the same as the NCF in the UK. In the UK, NCF is a legal document which is binding on the schools and the people who are running the schools. Our NCF seems to be slightly different, of a different order. If we look at the New Education Policy 1986, it says that the NCF should be seen as a means to evolve a national system of education capable of responding to India's diversity of geographical and cultural milieus, while ensuring a common code of values along with academic components. So, it seems that it has a twin purpose. One is having something common which we can all call 'national', and therefore binds us together and the second purpose is that it should be open enough to give space to the cultural and geographical diversity.

It has a two-pronged aim which is pulling away from each other. I think that is the source of many of the debates on our NCF in the past as well as in the present.

What we should expect from a NCF are broad principles which connect education with our polity, with our socio-cultural reality, with our economy, give direction to it and underline the concerns of the times. This is the kind of area with which this kind of documents deals. What we should not expect from our NCF is an answer to what do I do in my classroom to teach fractions. But, if the curriculum framework does not have any principle or any allusion to how and where we can find answers to these questions, then perhaps this CF is not

doing its job. Otherwise it is doing more than what is expected of it. So, this is the kind of framework in which we are talking.

NCF 2005 has been loved by some and hated by some others. There are lots of debating points. I would like to focus on only three; 1. *This is an enabling, rather than a prescriptive document – partly this is inherent in the definition of a curriculum framework.* But then, this document emphasises this a little bit more. So, it is worthwhile to dwell on this issue more. 2. *The second is that it takes a broad, more updated and encompassing view of human knowledge.* But, there are also people who do not agree with this. 3. *The third one is that it takes a very serious view of learning, pedagogy and its connection with the school.*

Enabling rather than a prescriptive document

A curriculum framework and more particularly, a curriculum could actually be set for the whole nation and give answers to the four questions I raised in the beginning. There have been attempts like this in India. Though people say that MLLs were not curriculum documents, it was more like a standards document and for achievement testing etc.; but since nothing else was there with MLLs, it acted like a curriculum document in isolation. If you go back to 1978, there was another document called MLC – Minimum Learning Continuum. The MLC was more rational and open than the MLLs and it also answered the four questions for the whole nation. So, these two fall under the category of prescriptive document.

An enabling document has two aspects to it. One is, giving people the freedom to choose, stating in black and white that you can formulate your own CF for your curriculum, syllabi and textbook.

NCF 2005: Vision and Perplexities

Stating that in print alone is not going to give people the ability to formulate their own syllabi, textbooks etc. Therefore, the second part of enabling is capacity building or making resources available. If we look at the NCF 2005 in this model, then it does seek to enable teachers and administrators and their agencies involved in the design of 1) syllabus, 2) textbooks, 3) examination reforms to make rational choices and decisions. This document tries to give some sort of available knowledge base and rational to make these choices.

NCF 2005 says: “We expect that it will strengthen the on-going process of reforms such as the devolution of decision-making to teachers and elected local bodies”, while it also identifies new areas for attention such as the need for plurality of textbooks, urgent improvement in the examination system. To put what is in this quote into context, I have to go back to the Kothari Commission which admits that a curriculum framework can only give principles and all other things should be worked out at the ground level. But when NCF 2005 talks about textbooks, it seems to get scared of its own prescription and asks: How shall we maintain the national standards? Then, Rajasthan, Kerala and Karnataka might have different standards of learning mathematics. They also talk of biases creeping into the textbooks and no authentic knowledge in the textbook. This problem they say could be solved through very well written, centrally written textbooks for the whole nation. The prescription or recommendation made at one point is undone at another point. That is why I am bringing in the issue of the plurality of these textbooks. If someone is allowed to formulate their own syllabi, their own curriculum in their own states etc., then allowing them to create their own textbooks would be a useful thing.

There was a very lively debate on whether districts could be allowed to formulate their own curriculum, whether it is possible to have different syllabi for different districts depending on their own geographical cultural contexts. The document favours the view that given the adherence to certain principles which are same throughout the nation, given the adherence to certain kinds of standards of achievement which again could be more or less same throughout the nation, every district could perhaps be given and should be given the freedom to formulate its own curriculum, syllabi and there should be a multiplicity of textbooks.

Now, this reason comes from the idea that schools should be autonomous in their decision-making, in their pedagogy. At the moment, schools are given autonomy in pedagogy – they are supposed to decide on what kind of methodologies they use to teach in the classroom.. But, beyond that, textbooks are prescribed in the government schools at least and syllabi are definitely prescribed. There is a move in NCF 2005 which argues for greater autonomy for the teacher and for the school. In this sense, it is not a document to be followed in total, but a framework to be debated, understood, and adjusted according to one's needs, used with responsibility and freedom; responsibility to adhere to and understand the common principle and the freedom to choose what you like after that. That is why NCF 2005 is not a single document.

In the exercise of developing NCF 2005 document, there were also 21 focus groups which had different kinds of subjects ranging from pedagogy of different subjects to systemic reforms to various kinds of issues – education of girls, dalits and tribal children, handicrafts, art and so on. Ideally, the total package of the NCF document with all supplementary materials is supposed to be an enabling package in

the sense that it provides basic principles as well as reference material from which one can source ideas. Now, the beautiful thing about these focus group papers is that if you read them, you will find many contradictions in them. One paper may be contradicting the other and a single paper may be contradicting itself.

Delving deeper into its inconsistency has made me understand that if you have a very consistent document throughout the nation, then you are likely to leave most people out. So, if you want to have something that reflects the concerns and all the strains of thinking and ideas in education, then you have to build in some sort of inconsistency in that. This reminds me of Godel's theorem – that in a finite system, you can either have consistency or completeness. This means, suppose in a system like Geometry — you have axioms, you have rules of inference and you can prove certain theorems. Completeness means being able to prove all theorems which are true in this system. If you want to prove all theorems, your system becomes inconsistent and if you want to remain consistent, then some of your theorems remain left out. So, that seems to be applying to the curriculum document. If you want to bring every legitimate concern in, then it has to do with a certain amount of inconsistency. That is one character of this document.

Broader view of knowledge

NCF 2005 takes a significant departure from our earlier document in defining knowledge. Let us look at the characterisation of knowledge which goes into this document. Knowledge can be conceived of as experience or organized through language into patterns of thought or structures of concepts, thus creating meaning which in turn helps understand the world we live in. But, knowledge

might itself be trying to articulate a notion of knowledge. This definition might be very unsettling for people who think of knowledge in a different sense.

The second part is that knowledge can also be conceived of as patterns of activity or physical dexterity interwoven with thought, contributing to acting in the world, creating and making things. This unsettles people even more. NCF 2005 takes into account the interconnection between understanding, how we look at the world, how we make sense of the world, how we interpret the experiences. This kind of characterisation of knowledge allows us to include activity and creativity in it. Therefore, a significant departure which is noted in the document as something new, which does not occur in any other curriculum document, is knowledge in practice.

Usually pottery, weaving and carpentry are seen as crafts, based on skills that can be applied through repeated practice and not involving much of intellectual understanding. In a way, the knowledge which we seek to impart to children in the classroom is more the knowledge which could be formulated in the language which philosophers sometimes call propositional knowledge and which our subjects are composed of and often we create this dichotomy between theory and practice. We call that knowledge theory and we call these things practice and we feel that these practices are themselves not less, though they may have a knowledge base and that is the kind of ideas in which these kinds of subjects are analyzed.

But if we take a different notion of knowledge—experiences organized into thoughts, into concepts and structures—then it becomes possible for us to look at knowledge in a slightly different manner

NCF 2005: Vision and Perplexities

and bring the knowledge of practice also in the gamut of learning. The central issue of connecting one's own craft to the socio-cultural aspects of the community and economic becomes included in the view of knowledge that NCF 2005 takes.

There is another debate in which this curriculum document is attacked: that it makes too sharp a distinction between information and knowledge. But, there are also problems with this distinction, because if you take one of the traditional definitions of knowledge as justified true belief, then perhaps the distinction between information and knowledge disappears. So, any particular piece of belief which is true, which is justified and which you believe in, becomes your knowledge and therefore the kind of distinctions we make in day-to-day information and knowledge do not look very sound in that perspective.

From the pedagogical point of view, the distinction between information and knowledge is extremely important. A philosopher can live happily without making this distinction. But a teacher will find life very difficult. Let us take a sentence like "Hospet is a district in Karnataka". Now, this could just be a string of words responded on queue. If you ask the child to name a district of Karnataka, then he will say "Hospet" and may not attach any meaning. Many of our children learn at that level. At the information level perhaps you can say that the child can produce other relevant strings of similar kinds of things and also has a notion of what a district might be. For a teacher to get it to the level of knowledge, you have to integrate this piece of information into the larger body of the child's knowledge where it could be utilized either to learn something new or to derive new conclusions from several pieces of old and new information. This alertness to connect all information together to

make a total picture which could be utilized in decision-making, can perhaps be called knowledge. The information alone perhaps may not serve the purpose of the child.

This point is made so many times in the document and with such force that this has almost become clichéd. I think there is justification for that also. The justification is that this is one of the biggest problems in our education system.

Learning and its connection with the school

Another important aspect which was there in our educational discourse, but not much attention was paid to it was about the basis for different school subjects and disciplines. There is an intuitive understanding, there are people who understand it very well and have certain theories. But in formulating our curriculum documents, use of this knowledge has either been absent or minimal. We have been taking subjects as something God-given. This document tries to scratch the surface. It does not do justice to the issue, but goes slightly ahead.

To emphasize the point, let me focus on the debate between integrated curriculum v/s a subject-based curriculum. Votaries of the integrated curriculum say that the child sees the world as a unified whole and that these distinctions are artificial. Subject-defenders say that human knowledge has grown so much that without having some sort of organizing principle, you cannot handle it and you are not going to go too far. At one level, when children are learning, knowledge is sort of integrated. But, as they achieve more depth in understanding, they do become separate. Proficiency in terms of exploration in knowledge would necessarily lead to different disciplines/subjects. But, what are those subjects? The curriculum framework tries to bring in some aspects of how one can think about these issues. But,

because a curriculum document has limited space, it does hint what kind of reasons can come to bear upon this kind of debate. Yet it gives enough that you start thinking about what the difference is between historical and mathematical knowledge and ways of creating and ways of validation and whether our investigation into these things give sufficient grounds to see the similarities, inter-connections as well as the special significance of each subject in the total curriculum.

The approach taken by the curriculum document is to explore the forms of understanding and it gives about 7 or 8 forms of understanding which are assumed to be enlightening our pedagogy as well as choice of various kinds of subjects. Also the document looks at the relative importance which should be given to the subjects and the choice of specific content within each subject. So, that is another important aspect in terms of knowledge which this curriculum framework talks about.

The last thing about the theme of knowledge that I would like to talk about is engagement with local knowledge. What is this local knowledge the document is talking about? In one of the seminars, I heard a friend claiming that Dalit and tribal mathematics has different epistemology. So, to claim that tribal or dalit or any community has a different way of producing justification for this kind of claims, perhaps is too far and extreme a view of local knowledge and this document is not taking that view. Another view is that could there be something called knowledge of local validity. Some knowledge which is valid here may not be valid somewhere else. For example before we go in the sun, it is good to eat onions. This information may be very useful in Bikaner in Rajasthan. There could be information and knowledge

which is very important in dealing with the local geographical situations. Similarly, there could be information and ways of understanding which could be very important in dealing with the socio-cultural situations.

The document says that one has to engage with this knowledge. It does not say that one has to take that into the curriculum. It says that it is a necessary condition of learning to engage with this knowledge and to see the connection between the universally respected scientific knowledge and local knowledge and how this connection could be worked out. Also, this means that we all perhaps would agree at some point that learning is nothing but connecting and therefore, if you want a child to learn something, then you have to connect that to the child's present mental state and structure. Hence, you have no option but to start from where the child is and all that the child brings to class is his local understanding and local knowledge. If you discard it, scorn it, think that it is wrong and comes in the way of scientific knowledge and this is inferior, then you are cutting the basis on which the child can learn. Therefore, engagement in the curriculum, in the class, in the school with local knowledge is extremely important. This point is made quite forcefully here.

Pedagogy

Two things the document recommends are:

1. Constructivist and critical pedagogies. They are not the same and they are hotly contested issues.
2. It recommends a school where the child comes wholeheartedly, a school which is well-organized and warm and a school which gives protection and a feeling of being wanted to the child. The importance given to the school as a learning place in this document is far greater than in our earlier documents.

NCF 2005: Vision and Perplexities

Academic and intellectual debates are important and people who are raising these debates are doing a significant service to the nation and educational knowledge.

In Sahmat's document called *Debating Education*, Shamim Akhtar tells us that native wisdom of a child comes from his home. The function of the school is not to help the child create his own knowledge, but to divest him of the social prejudices, beliefs and superstitions. It may be true that children come with a lot of biases and prejudices. But children also come with a lot of knowledge – sense of language, making sense of the world and also a lot of warmth and love. So, the child is not a one-sided entity. The job of the school is to divest the child of these notions forcibly and through indoctrination or through a general engagement of the mind so that the child moves slowly from one situation to another with full understanding and joy. That is the question and perhaps the critic does not see that question. He just attacks child's knowledge.

Second thing is, knowledge can be seen as experience organized through language. This notion is also contested. Prof. Irfan Habib gives us a one-liner that if feelings were knowledge, then prejudices would also be knowledge. Now, where the curriculum document mentions feelings is that human beings in the last several centuries have developed a whole repertoire of knowledge, ways of feeling, ways of expressing, and several things. Again, Prof. Habib tells us that in over emphasizing traditional knowledge a great danger lurks behind the glorification of primitive views contrasted to scientific concepts.

We seem to be taking a fixed view of knowledge which is in the hands of a few intellectuals and we seem to be looking at the masses in a certain manner that they need to be bulldozed out of their own

understanding and should be brought to our understanding. This curriculum document opposes this.

Is this document perfect? Far from it. It is not clear, it is inconsistent, it is actually cliché-ridden. Sections of this are very weak and need to be rewritten. Language throughout the document is very bad. But, substance wise, perhaps, this is by far the most advanced curriculum framework we have in India.

The last thing I would say may sound as if I am trying to defend the document and it is very difficult at the tail-end of my talk to convince you that I have not been defending the document. But I would still like to share with you that I have been trying to defend certain ideas and not the document.

My purpose is not at all that. The document may be thrown out tomorrow. The purpose is the idea of an enabling document, the idea of a wider perspective of knowledge, the idea of a pedagogy which is both constructivist and critical in spite of all the controversies. The idea of people's knowledge and people's ways of understanding should have a place in the school. These are the ideas I have been trying to defend.

The value of this document will only get realized when many schools and educators get to engage with it and understand what it means and then interpret what it means for them. This is a constant issue because there is a dearth of people who can connect the classroom pedagogy and curriculum and the larger perspective on education and who can formulate syllabi. So, it seems that the division of labour in our education system has become too tight and this is detrimental to further development. There are some people who will think theory and

formulate the curriculum framework and curricula. There are certain other people who know their subjects, and they will tell you the syllabi. Then, there are again a different set of people who will be left to write the textbooks. By the time the textbooks reach schools, the curriculum, the syllabus and every document has

gone somewhere else. All that the teacher has in his hands is the textbook and he is supposed to be teaching. But who should be building the bridges? Is it the MHRD, is it the NCERT, is it the state government? Is it people like us? Who should be taking it to the people? I think it is all those who are concerned with it.

Robit Dhankar is the founder of Digantar (a voluntary organization in Jaipur engaged in providing alternative education to rural children) who was an integral part of the National Curriculum Framework 2005 process. He trained as a teacher under David Horsburgh in the Neelbagh School, and taught at the elementary level for about 15 years and later a philosophy of education course in TISS, Mumbai. Presently he works as Professor-Director, Academic Development in Azim Premji University, Bangalore.

[Excerpts from the talk delivered at the Centre for Learning Conference at Bangalore in December 2006]

Light the lamp within, Teacher

Light the lamp within, Teacher

Subroto Bagchi

Teacher, the people who write my textbooks and the ones who prescribe the syllabi will not tell you how important inclusion is for me to do well in life. Without the sense of inclusion, I will not be able to know that boundaries are meant to be pushed... not be lived in.

Take for example the fact that I clean my house but empty my garbage on the road. That is because the road is not “included” in what I deem to be my own.

I feed my own child but do not enquire if the maid has eaten today. Her hunger is not included in my hunger. I take my child to the movies but do not ask him to call the neighbour’s child. That child’s seclusion is outside my zone of parenting. So, Teacher...teach me inclusion.

I pray to you to teach me to communicate.

The more I am caught in the rat race of the common entrance tests and cut throat competition...everyone will tell me that my survival depends on my power to impress and in that urge, more I impress, the less I will communicate. Teach me to speak and be able to write such that I am able to convey what I feel.

Teach me to communicate with the simplicity of the child and the nakedness of a flower. Teach me to communicate with people less gifted less privileged than I am. Teach me to communicate with those who have come before me and those who will follow. Teach me to communicate with things animate and inanimate.

I pray to you to teach me to understand the nature of things.

Teacher, teach me “sense making” in the increasingly senseless world. Teach me not just what is good or what is bad. I may not always be lucky to be in situations that will be simply either black or white. In a world in which Gods will have feet of clay and Godmen will be more men and less God, teach me how to make sense of things such that I am able to understand things around me without the intermediation of soothsayers and spiritual Gurus.

Teach me such that I am able to , and catch up with awesome imbalances, in the natural state of things that cause death and destruction and can one day, engulf me and whatever else I am trying to leave behind. Each time I see a scavenging bird on my city’s skyline. Teacher, tell me why the singing birds are going away. And tell me how I can see them again perched on my window sill.

I pray to you to teach me not just the ability to answer, but also the power to question.

It is because everyone is telling me to do as told. Before I know, I am becoming enslaved in a social, economic and political state in which progress is held hostage because we do not ask questions. Only if we ask questions, we can get answers. If we get the answers, we can explore how to establish a higher order of things. If we ask the questions, we will also learn to be accountable. We will be more willing to accept that when we ask the questions, we can be questioned too. In that mutuality, trust will emerge and balance itself.

*As you teach me the ability to ask questions,
I also pray to you to teach me to say "I do
not know."*

In all humility, I must admit Teacher, that not always will I have all the answers. When I do not have the answer teach me to say, "I do not know." I know it takes courage and self-confidence to say that I do not know. So often I see people around me keep silent when admission of ignorance could have opened them to new relationships and new knowledge. Teach me the power to say, "I do not know." Even if it causes me monetary disgrace. Because Teacher, when I develop the self-confidence to say that I do not know. I will be comfortable in being who I am. That will make me more real in an increasingly make-believe world.

*Just as you teach me to say, "I do not know."
I pray to you to teach me to actively seek help.*

Higher my achievements and greater my position of power, the more helpless I will become; the less I will know about the state of things. In those moments of my helplessness, my ego will come in my way of seeking help. My workplace will make me falsely that seeking help is a sign of weakness.

Teach me to seek help from small people. Teacher, teach me that flower needs help from the bee to pollinate. The water needs help from the air to raise itself to the sky. O' Teacher, please teach me such that I understand that even the lord of the universe can do with a little help from me. Thereby, I have no shame in seeking help from others.

Subroto Bagchi is co-founder and Chief Operating Officer, MindTree Consulting Pvt. Ltd.

[Excerpts from the convocation address at the International Academy for Creative Teaching, Bangalore.]

Active Learning, Passive Teaching

Arvind Gupta

This was a national level workshop with school teachers. They were asked, “Which year of your life did you learn the most?” This was a personal question and not a test of their aptitude or knowledge base. After a little pause one lady said, “In class 9th I had a wonderful science teacher. She actually took us to the science lab and showed us experiments – how to make oxygen. She even let us play around in the laboratory. This is how I got interested in science. I guess I was 15 years old then.”

Another teacher said, “Earlier I was very diffident and timid. While doing B.Ed. I had a fine teacher who encouraged me to speak and inspired me to read good books on education. Books like *Divasvapna* and *Tottochan* opened up a totally new world for me. For the first time I understood the deep passion and the compassion of an inspiring teacher. I learnt the most in my 22nd year.”

Both teachers had given clear, lucid answers. Their answers came straight from the heart. But both missed the question by a long shot – which year of their lives had they learnt the most? The answer was clearly the first year of their lives. As teachers and parents we often forget that the first few years of a child’s life are the most important years. When we were just born we soaked in all the sights, smells, sounds which came to us. We probed, touched, licked and kicked everything within reach. Children are totally new to this strange big world and want to make sense of it with all the intensity that they can muster.

We learn the most in our first year. As we grow old, our learning slows. While

body cells die and are replaced, we get our entire reservoir of brain cells “neurons” at birth. Neurons only deplete, they are never replaced. Luckily we get a large stock of them at birth.

Before children can understand a thing they need experience: seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling, choosing, arranging, putting things together and taking them apart. Children need to experiment with real things. Children need lots of concrete experiences with a variety of materials – cutting, sticking, manipulating, assembling etc. This rich experiential base will later provide fertile ground to nurture abstract and abstruse concepts. The cardinal principles of education enunciate – from the near to the far, from the concrete to the abstract.

Little children love crumbling and tearing old newspaper. The paper has a warp and a weft. While tearing they discover that they are able to tear long, almost parallel strips in one orientation and only short strips in the other direction. Why this? Perhaps there is a design to it. The grains of paper are so arranged that there is more strength in one direction as compared to the other. This is the “internal discipline” of the material and not an external dictat imposed by the teacher. Children imbibe these nuances without any words.

The beauty of an “activity” based classroom is that the teacher spared the task of evaluation. If the “flying fish” or a paper “helicopter” is not made well it will simply not fly, giving instant feedback (with no adult help) that there is some goof-up.

The child will then roll-up her sleeves and will keep modifying until her model flies.

It is adult arrogance to say that we “teach” children. All children are born learners. They learn a great deal by themselves, often by intently watching and imitating the adults around them. All children learn to speak and communicate – one of most difficult skills to learn without being “taught”. Children have enormous powers of concentration.

Maria Montessori demonstrated this over a hundred years ago. She was Italy’s first woman doctor. After getting her Medical degree Montessori worked with the children of slum dwellers. Montessori is famous the world over for her deep pedagogical insights. She designed scores of teaching aids – several of them are still in active use – for instance the Post Box. This is a hollow wooden cubical box. On each surface of the box is a cutout of a particular geometric shape – a circle, triangle, square etc. There are corresponding wooden blocks which have to be “posted-in” the respective slots. A wooden ball for instance would go into a circular hole, and a prism would fit into the triangular slot.

There was an elderly priest who was very interested in Montessori’s work. On Sundays he would drop by to see Montessori’s experiments. One day Montessori took him to a corner of the class, where a little girl was playing with the post-box. She was deeply absorbed in her work. Montessori asked the other children to make a circle around the girl and sing a song to disturb her concentration. But the little girl was so absorbed in her work – in trying to figure out which block goes into which slot, that she did not even look up. After some time Montessori lifted the little girl physically and seated her on a big table.



As soon as the girl got her berth she once again got absorbed in trying to figure out which block will go into a particular slot. She was totally lost in her own world.

The priest – a good old Samaritan, often used to bring toffees and chocolates for the kids. On that day he had got a big box of biscuits. He started distributing biscuits to the children. He also gave the little girl a biscuit. The little girl reluctantly took the biscuit. She intently looked at it. She saw that the biscuit was rectangular in shape. So, she posted the biscuit in the rectangular slot of the post-box!

Montessori demonstrated a hundred years ago that children do not learn through bribes. They learn because they are new to the world and want to understand how it works. Mark sheets, certificates, medals, stars and prizes are bad substitutes for the real joy of knowing the world.

In India the pre-school years are perhaps the most neglected part of a child’s education. Most of the nursery schools have little understanding about childhood. Little children who should be playing with sand and water are made to learn the alphabets and colours by rote.

Active Learning, Passive Teaching

Dr. Maria Montessori, physician, anthropologist and pedagogue, studied children of all “abilities”, racial, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds for over fifty years. Her intense scientific observation of the human being from birth to maturity allowed her to distil a body of philosophical, psychological and pedagogical principles. These, together with a vast range of auto-didactic materials, came to be known as the Montessori Method. Maria Montessori was not a teacher, yet she studied educational methods for years and found them wanting, possibly because none of them took into account the two seemingly paradoxical extremes which are at the centre of her pedagogy: the universal characteristics of the child, and the child as a unique individual.

Montessori's first stint with children came in the form of the Orthophrenic School, a "medico-pedagogical institute" in Rome where she developed methods and material to aid teachers in educating mentally disabled children. She later applied her pedagogy and further expanded it too for the mainstream children at Casa dei Bambini (Children's House). Based on her observations at Casa, Montessori implemented a number of practices that became hallmarks of her educational philosophy. She replaced the heavy furniture with child-sized tables and chairs light enough for the children

to move, and placed child-sized materials on low, accessible shelves. She expanded the range of practical activities to include the care of the environment and the self. She also included large open air sections in the classroom encouraging children to come and go as they please in the room's different areas and lessons. She felt by working independently children could reach new levels of autonomy and become self-motivated to reach new levels of understanding. Montessori also came to believe that acknowledging all children as individuals and treating them as such would yield better learning and fulfilled potential in each particular child. She experimented with allowing children free choice of the materials, uninterrupted work, and freedom of movement and activity within the limits set by the environment. She began to see independence as the aim of education, and the role of the teacher as an observer and director of children's innate psychological development.

Maria Montessori spent her later years traveling the world publicizing the Montessori Method, visiting Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, India (several times), the UK, Denmark and many other countries. She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize three times and was also awarded the French Legion of Honour, Officer of the Dutch Order of Orange Nassau, and received an Honorary Doctorate of the University of Amsterdam.

Source: <http://ami-global.org/> and www.wikipedia.org

Hole in the Wall

Dr. Sugata Mitra

*The Hole in the Wall experiment, a vital step in the direction of exploring Self-Organized Learning, exhibited that children could be taught by computers very easily without any formal training. Dr. Mitra termed this Minimally Invasive Education. The experiment has since been repeated by placing some 23 walled computer kiosks in rural India. In 2004 the experiment was carried out in Cambodia. This work demonstrated that groups of children, irrespective of who or where they are, can learn to use computers and the Internet on their own with public computers in open spaces such as roads and playgrounds, even without knowing English. The Hole in the Wall experiment inspired Indian diplomat Vikas Swarup to write his debut novel *Q & A*, which later became the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*.*

In early 1999, some colleagues and I sunk a computer into the opening of a wall near our office in Kalkaji, New Delhi. The area was located in an expansive slum, with desperately poor people struggling to survive. The screen was visible from the street, and the PC was available to anyone who passed by. The computer had online access and a number of programs that could be used, but no instructions were given for its use.

What happened next astonished us. Children came running out of the nearest

slum and glued themselves to the computer. They couldn't get enough. They began to click and explore. They began to learn how to use this strange thing. A few hours later, a visibly surprised Vivek said the children were actually surfing the Web.

We left the PC where it was, available to everyone on the street, and within six months the children of the neighborhood had learned all the mouse operations, could open and close programs, and were going online to download games, music and videos. We asked them how they had



Sugata Mitra with children at a hole-in-the-wall project in Delhi in 2011 | Photograph: TED

Hole in the Wall

learned all of these sophisticated maneuvers, and each time they told us they had taught themselves.

Interestingly, they described the computer in their own terms, often coining words to indicate what they saw on the screen. For instance, the children's word for the hourglass symbol that appears when a program is *"thinking"* was *"damru"* the name of a small wooden drum shaped like an hourglass that is a symbol of the Hindu god Shiva. The mouse cursor was called *"sui"* a Hindi word for needle, or *"teer"* which means arrow.

We repeated the experiment in two other locations: in the city of Shivpuri in Madhya Pradesh, and in a village called Madantusi in Uttar Pradesh. Both of these experiments showed the same result as the Kalkaji experiment: The children seemed to learn to use the computer without any assistance. Language did not matter, and neither did education.

Over the next decade we did extensive research in self-directed learning, in many places and through many cultures. Each time, the children were able to develop deep learning by teaching themselves. I decided to call the method of instruction we had developed Minimally Invasive Education (MIE). The rest of the world continues to call it the Hole in the Wall.

Certain common observations from our experiments emerged, suggesting the following learning process occurs when children self-instruct in computer usage:

1. Discoveries tend to happen in one of two ways: When one child in a group already knows something about computers, he or she shows off those skills to the others. Or, while the others watch, one child explores

randomly in the GUI (Graphical User Interface) environment until an accidental discovery is made. For example, the child may discover that the cursor changes to a hand shape at certain places on the screen.

2. Several children repeat the discovery for themselves by asking the first child to let them try it.
3. While in Step 2, one or more children make more accidental or incidental discoveries.
4. All the children repeat all the discoveries made and, in the process, make more discoveries. They soon start to create a vocabulary to describe their experiences.
5. The vocabulary encourages them to perceive generalizations, such as, "When you click on a hand-shaped cursor, it changes to the hourglass shape for a while and a new page comes up."
6. They memorize entire procedures for doing something, such as how to open a painting program and retrieve a saved picture. Whenever a child finds a shorter procedure, he or she teaches it to the others. They discuss, hold small conferences, make their own timetables and research plans. It is important not to underestimate them.
7. The group divides itself into the "knows" and the "know-nots" much as they might divide themselves into "haves" and "have-nots" with regard to their possessions. However, a child that knows will share that knowledge in return for friendship and reciprocity of information, unlike with the ownership of physical things, where they can use

force to get what they do not have. When you “take” information, the donor doesn’t “lose” it!

8. A stage is reached when no further discoveries are being made and the children occupy themselves with practicing what they have already learned. At this point, intervention is required to plant a new seed for discovery, such as, “Did you know that computers could play music? Here, let me play a song for you.” In the Hole in the Wall computers, such minimal intervention happens accidentally from passing adults or just by accidental discoveries. Usually, a spiral of discoveries follows and another self-instructional cycle begins.

When working in groups, children do not need to be “taught” how to use computers. They can teach themselves. Their ability

to do so seems to be independent of educational background, literacy level, social or economic status, ethnicity and place of origin, gender, geographic location (i.e., city, town or village), or intelligence.

Using the Hole in the Wall setup with a single PC, children can learn access and operate most of the software and applications on the computer and the Internet in approximately three months. In addition, local teachers and field observers noted that the children demonstrated improvements in enrollment, attendance and performance on school examinations, particularly in subjects that deal with computing skills; English vocabulary and usage; concentration, attention span and problem-solving skills; and working cooperatively and self-regulation.

I believe that MLE should be an important part of every school’s curricula.

[Excerpts from Dr. Mitra’s article ‘The Hole in the Wall Project and the Power of Self-Organized Learning’ that appeared on February 3, 2012 in Edutopia, the comprehensive website of the George Lucas Educational Foundation, US that increases knowledge, sharing, and adoption of what works in K-12 education]

Dr. Sugata Mitra is Professor of Educational Technology at the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences at Newcastle University, England. Best known for his Hole in the Wall experiment, Dr. Mitra has the Dewang Mehta Award 1999, recognition for the best open access publication in the world for 2005 and the TED Prize 2013 under his belt.

Doing Their Duty

Doing Their Duty

Arvind Gupta

Why do people obey orders even when it goes against their conscience?

Why do human beings kill other humans? Soldiers kill enemies and civilians with relative ease when commanded by authority. We see atrocities all over. In the Sikh carnage of 1984, the Babri Masjid episode, the Gujarat riots thousands of innocents lost their lives for no fault of theirs. Everyday we read of suicide bombers carrying out attacks on civilian targets in Afghanistan. Very recently 500 Naxalites in Orissa attacked a police post, looted the armoury and killed policemen. The 9/11 attack in America took the world by storm. The World's most powerful nation could not defend and shield itself from the attack by a handful of highly motivated people.

From 1933 to 1945, millions of innocent Jews were systematically slaughtered on command and shoved into gas chambers. These inhumane policies may have emerged in the mind of a single person - Hitler, but they could not have been implemented unless a large willing force was ready to obey orders. The Nazi extermination of European Jews is the most extreme instance of cruelty. Yet in lesser degree this type of thing is constantly recurring. Ordinary citizens are constantly ordered to destroy other people in the name of nation, religion, patriotism and language. People consider it their duty to obey orders. Thus obedience to authority long praised as a virtue, becomes a heinous sin when used for a malevolent cause.

Are human beings innately cruel?

There have been strong for and against stands on human aggression. The philosophical

arguments have often been supported by certain experiments which throw light on the nature of human aggression. One pioneering experiment was conducted in the early 60's in Yale University. It was concerned with the effect of punishment on learning. Two people were involved – a “teacher” and a “learner”. The learner was taken to a room, seated on a chair, his arms strapped to prevent excess movement, and an electrode attached to his wrist. He was asked to learn a list of pair words. If the learner gave a wrong answer, the teacher was expected to punish by administering an electric shock. The teacher could increase the intensity of the shock from 15-volts to 450-volts. The point of the experiment was to see how far a person would proceed in a concrete and measurable situation in which he was ordered to inflict increasing pain on a protesting victim. At what point would the subject refuse to obey the experimenter?

When the learner received a shock of 75-volts he grunted. At 120-volts he complained verbally. At 150-volts he demanded to be released from the experiment. His protests continued as the shocks escalated, growing increasingly vehement and emotional. At 285-volts his responses could only be described as an agonized scream. Many teachers kept giving increasingly large shocks despite the pleadings of the learner to be released. The experiment was tried with a 1000 different teachers. Almost 700 gave shocks to the learners. In fact the “teacher” in the experiment was a genuinely naïve subject. He just came to the laboratory as a participant. The “learner” was a professional

actor who actually receives no shock at all. The victim just feigned the shocks.

The students in the Yale University would have been easiest to get as “subjects” or “teachers”. But there was a chance that some of them had heard about the experiment. It appeared better to draw subjects from the wider society – a larger source. To recruit subjects an advertisement in the local newspaper called for people of all occupations to take part in this study of memory and learning. It offered a small compensation for travel. Typical subjects who participated in the study were postal clerks, high school teachers, salesmen, engineers and labourers.

How does one explain this behaviour?

Almost two-thirds of the participants fell into the category of “obedient” subjects – they went on administering greater electric shocks. Were they all monsters? Did they represent the sadistic fringe of society? But they were all ordinary people drawn from various sections of society. How does one make sense of it? Is aggression and violence innate to human nature?

Is our social upbringing to blame?

The question arises as to whether there is any connection between what we have studied in the laboratory and the manifestation of violence in Nazi camps and communal carnage. The difference in the two situations may be enormous but the essential features remain intact. The essence of obedience consists in the fact that a person comes to view himself as

the instrument for carrying out another person’s wishes, and therefore he no more regards himself responsible for his actions. After this critical shift of viewpoint the person starts obeying almost blindly. The essence of obedience lies in a person giving himself over to authority and no longer reflecting and holding himself responsible for the cause of his own actions.

The most fundamental finding of the study: ordinary people simply doing their jobs, and, could. Americans bombing Vietnamese children said they “did it for a noble cause.” The terrorists who kill innocent people in the name of religion, nation, and patriotism offer the same plea.

George Orwell caught the essence of the situation: “As I write, highly civilized people are flying overhead, trying to kill me. They do not feel any enmity against me as an individual, nor I against them. They are only ‘doing their duty’ as the saying goes. Most of them, I have no doubt are kind-hearted, law abiding men who would never dream of committing murder in private life. On the other hand, if one of them succeeds in blowing me to pieces, with a well-placed bomb, he will never sleep the worse for it.”

The above experiment is a reflection of the uncritical ways in which we school our children. Most schools have a prayer – which essentially coaxes children to submit to the power of the Almighty, teachers and the parents. The mantra of unconditional obedience turns into the most gruesome social vice when these innately bright minds without any particular hostility on their part become agents of terrible destruction to humanity, leaving only a handful of people with the zeal to resist blind authority.

शिक्षा में बाल साहित्य की भूमिका

कृष्ण कुमार

हिन्दी बाल साहित्य की अगर एक मोटी समीक्षा करें, पिछले सौ वर्षों की, तो इतने अरसे अभी तक केवल दो बच्चों की पत्रिकाएँ चल सकी हैं। बाल सखा जिसने 50 वर्ष पूरे किए और बालक जो लगभग 45 वर्ष तक चली। यह अपने आप में एक बड़ा आँकड़ा है कि चकमक आज 300 अंक पूरे कर अपनी 25वीं सालगिरह मना रही है। पिछले 25-30 वर्षों की भारतीय शिक्षा पद्धति व्यवस्था को जब हम याद करते हैं तो ज़ाहिर है कि बेहतर या बदतर के वर्गों में बाँटने का मन होता है, लेकिन एक चीज़ है जिसको लेकर मैं समझता हूँ कि कोई असहमत नहीं हो सकता और वह है, बदलाव। शिक्षा और समाज बहुत बड़े बदलाव से गुज़रे हैं। संक्षेप में यह कहना बहुत ज़रूरी है कि अगर हम बच्चों के सन्दर्भ में विचार कर रहे हैं, शिक्षा पर विचार कर रहे हैं तो निश्चित रूप से ये 20-25 वर्ष एक बहुत बड़ी सामाजिक परिघटना के वर्ष हैं।

25 वर्ष पहले इस बात की कल्पना बहुत कम लोग कर सकते थे कि पाँच व छः वर्ष की आयु के लगभग सभी बच्चे किसी-न-किसी रूप में किसी-न-किसी स्कूल में प्रवेश पा चुके होंगे। कोई सौ साल पहले 1911 में गोपाल कृष्ण गोखले ने बच्चों की शिक्षा को लेकर उस समय की इम्पीरियल लेजिस्लेटिव असेम्बली में एक बिल रखा था। उस समय उन्होंने सिर्फ लड़कों की शिक्षा की बात की थी। शिक्षा को अनिवार्य, निःशुल्क और सार्वजनिक बनाने के लिए यह बिल पर्याप्त संख्या में मत नहीं पा सका था। 1911 की तुलना में 2011 का दृश्य हमको इस बात का सन्तोष अवश्य देता है कि भले ही बहुत देर से ही सही, पर यह सम्भव हुआ। गोपाल कृष्ण गोखले का प्रयास आज एक कानून की शकल ले चुका है। भले ही इसको लेकर तमाम तरह के प्रश्न हैं, विवाद हैं इत्यादि।

सोचने की बात यह है कि इतने समय बाद तंत्र का यह कानून किस तरह की सामाजिक व्याप्ति पाएगा। हमारे जीवन काल में इस कानून के ज़रिए क्या बच्चा नए तरीके से रचा जाएगा? क्या भारत की शिक्षा व्यवस्था अपनी औपनिवेशिक

विरासत से कुछ और मुक्ति पा सकेगी? ये सभी सवाल बाल साहित्य के सन्दर्भ में विशेष महत्वपूर्ण हैं क्योंकि शिक्षा में बाल साहित्य की जगह बनाने के लिए काम एक तरह का संघर्ष सिद्ध हुआ।

बहुत बड़ी मात्रा में बाल साहित्य का प्रकाशन, बाल साहित्य का प्रसार और उस पर चिन्तन, उसके चित्रों पर, उसकी साहित्यिकता पर, भाषा पर - इन तमाम चीज़ों पर एकलव्य ने देश में चिन्तन को आगे बढ़ाने में बहुत बड़ी भूमिका इधर के वर्षों में निभाई है। तो यह सिर्फ निर्माण का काम नहीं है, यह भी एक प्रकार का संघर्ष रहा है, और अभी है। किसी तरह से बाल साहित्य की व्याप्ति शिक्षा व्यवस्था में है नहीं, या हो नहीं पा रही है। जगह हम बनाते हैं, जब तक हम इस जगह के आसपास पहरेदारी करने के लिए बैठते हैं, तब तक वह जगह रुकती है। वहाँ से जैसे ही छूटे तो उस जगह पर फिर गर्म हवाएँ आ जाती हैं, पानी से वह जगह घिर जाती है। क्या वजह है? बच्चों का साहित्य जैसा एक सुन्दर सरल विषय है। क्या झगड़ा है इसका शिक्षा व्यवस्था से, जिसकी वजह से ये संघर्ष होता है?

पाठ्यपुस्तक का आतंक

उदयनजी का एक मशहूर लेख है जो कई वर्ष पहले छपा था यह बताने के लिए कि पाठ्यपुस्तक अपने आप में एक संरचना है। उसके अन्दर क्या है, वह तो विवाद का विषय बनता ही रहता है। लेकिन वह स्वयं ही एक ढाँचे के रूप में भी चिन्ता का विषय है।

पाठ्यपुस्तक वह चीज़ है जो कि हमारी व्यवस्था को उसका औपनिवेशिक चरित्र देती है। बाल साहित्य की व्याप्ति के रास्ते में सबसे बड़ी रुकावट हमारी शिक्षा व्यवस्था का यह चरित्र है कि वह पाठ्यपुस्तक केन्द्रित है और पाठ्यपुस्तक के इर्द-गिर्द ही सारी शिक्षा व्यवस्था घूमती है। अध्यापक का सारा प्रयास उसके आसपास ही होता है। और शिक्षा व्यवस्था की जो धुरी है वह तो बिलकुल ही पाठ्यपुस्तक से चिपकी

हुई चलती है। पाठ्यपुस्तक स्वयं परीक्षा व्यवस्था से पैदा होने वाले भावों से आवेशित हो उठती है और जो डर परीक्षा के बारे में सोचकर बच्चों को लगता है, वही डर शिक्षकों को पाठ्यपुस्तकों को देखकर लगने लगता है। क्योंकि उनको मालूम होता है कि ये वह चीज़ है जो मुझे उस मेजोरिटी से बात कराएगी। और वही चीज़ है जो पढ़ने का मन नहीं होता लेकिन फिर भी मुझे पढ़नी ही पड़ेगी। ये कैसे हुआ कि पाठ्यपुस्तक एक ऐसा प्रतीक बन गई जिसके सामने दुनिया भर में फैला हुआ अनुभव-जगत, बच्चे का ज्ञान, बच्चे को अपने जीवन से खुद मिलने वाली खुराक, उन सबका कोई मायना नहीं रहा? इसके ज़रिए हर चीज़ का परीक्षण होगा। इसके ज़रिए ही स्कूल चलेंगे, इसकी धुरी पर चलेंगे। अगर आप सरकार की इन कोशिशों को देखें तो बहुत बड़ी कोशिश यही रहती है कि पाठ्यपुस्तक समय पर पहुँच जाए और उसकी पढ़ाई शुरू हो जाए।

केन्द्रीय विद्यालय जो सरकारी ढाँचे में सबसे अच्छे स्कूल माने जाते हैं, उनकी व्यवस्था तो इतनी पुख्ता है कि केन्द्रीय विद्यालय का राष्ट्रीय आयुक्त जो दिल्ली में बैठता है वो अपने कमरे में बैठा हुआ आपको बता सकता है कि आज लक्षद्वीप के केन्द्रीय विद्यालय में कौन-सा पाठ किस बात के संग चल रहा है। बल्कि उस पाठ का भी कौन-सा हिस्सा आज पढ़ाया जा रहा होगा, हर कोई को मालूम होता है। पूरे देश में वो एक साथ चलता है। शिक्षक को कितना समय किस इकाई पर देना है, किन अध्यापकों को कितना समय लगाना है, पाठ किस दिन शुरू हो और किस दिन खत्म हो जाए इस बात की पूरी निगरानी रखी जाती है, निगरानी करने का ज़िम्मा अधिकारी से ज़्यादा पाठ्यपुस्तक पर है। पाठ्यपुस्तक अपने आप में एक निगरानी करती है। यानी वो सभी तरीके से शिक्षा व्यवस्था और शिक्षक को नियंत्रित रखती है, बच्चों को भी नियंत्रित रखती है। और समाज में माता-पिताओं को भी लगातार यह सांत्वना देती रहती है कि जो कुछ काम हो रहा है कायदे से हो रहा है। और कायदा यहाँ पर दिखलाई देता है कि ये 26 पाठ नहीं हैं, 36 पाठ हैं। ये इस तरीके से हर महीने आगे बढ़ेंगे और अन्त में जाकर इन छत्तीस पाठों पर परीक्षा ली जाएगी। इसमें कुछ भी अनहोनी नहीं है, कुछ भी गलत नहीं है। आप जानते हैं कि आज का ज़माना ईमानदारी का नहीं है, पारदर्शिता का है। आप अगर गलती कर रहे हैं तो वेबसाइट पर आप उसे

दिखाते जाएँ, तो यह सही माना जाता है। यानी पारदर्शिता की प्रक्रिया के ज़रिए आपने उस गलती को गौण बना दिया। पाठ्यपुस्तक के ज़रिए पैदा होने वाली शैक्षिक कसावट या ईमानदारी इसी तरह की चीज़ है।

इसका क्या अर्थ है? शिक्षक को इस हद तक बाँध देने की क्या आवश्यकता है? इसका क्या औचित्य है? ये सब प्रश्न आज एक तरह से बेमानी से हो गए हैं। हालाँकि, इन प्रश्नों को बहुत समय से उठाया जाता रहा है। महात्मा गाँधी ने 1939 में साफ किया था कि अगर पाठ्यपुस्तक को ही तथ्य मान लिया जाए और उसी पर शिक्षा व्यवस्था टिक जाए तो शिक्षा और शिक्षक की वाणी की कीमत ही क्या रहेगी। इसलिए उन्होंने अपनी शिक्षा व्यवस्था का जो प्रस्ताव दिया था, उसमें पाठ्यपुस्तक के लिए कोई स्थान नहीं था। कुछ समय तक हमारी शिक्षा व्यवस्था इसके अनुसार थोड़ी-बहुत चल सकी, पर आज हमारे बीच उसके बहुत कम नमूने रह गए हैं।

बाल साहित्य - कौन किस तरफ?

हम सब लोग बाल साहित्य के शौकीन हैं, सोचते रहते हैं कि यह क्षेत्र क्यों लगातार दिक्कत पैदा करता है। मामला सिर्फ बाल साहित्य का ही नहीं है, कई और चीज़ों का भी है। कलाओं का मामला है। स्कूल में कलाओं की व्याप्ति नहीं हो सकी है। पुस्तकालय की व्याप्ति नहीं हो सकी है। हम बनाते ज़रूर हैं, इसमें बहुत-सा पैसा भी खर्च होता है, लेकिन वह चीज़ दिखती नहीं है।

कलाओं में अगर आप चारों कलाओं पर गौर करें - क्ले-वर्क पर गौर करें, नृत्य पर गौर करें, संगीत पर सोचें या कि चित्रकला पर तो स्कूल में चारों को लेकर एक तनाव लगातार बना रहता है। साल का एक ही दिन होता है जिस दिन तनाव कुछ हटता-सा है या उसके ऊपर एक पर्दा-सा पड़ जाता है। आप में से कोई बता सकता है उस दिन का क्या नाम होता है? वार्षिक उत्सव।

वार्षिक उत्सव के दिन एक मंच पर बालिकाएँ नृत्य करती हैं, कोई वी.आई.पी. होता है। कोई पुरस्कार देता है, कोई चित्रों की गैलरी से गुज़रता है इत्यादि इत्यादि। स्कूल में

कलाओं के लिए ये दिन तय किया जाता है। इन सभी चीज़ों और खेलकूद की भी हर बच्चे को ज़रूरत होती है। लेकिन स्कूल के जीवन में खेल की व्याप्ति प्रतियोगिता के ज़रिए की जाती है। जो बच्चे बाहर से पुरस्कार इत्यादि जीतते हैं, खेल उनके लिए है। बाकी के लिए पढ़ाई, मेहनत - अच्छे-अच्छे गुणों की भी यही परिस्थिति है। तो यह सब देखकर हम समझ सकते हैं कि बाल साहित्य के साथी कौन हैं। कलाएँ उनके साथी हैं। खेल उनके साथी हैं। पुस्तकालय उनका साथी है। और इसके शत्रु या अवरोधक कौन हैं? एक तरफ तो इसका सबसे बड़ा प्रतीक और अवरोध पाठ्यपुस्तक है और दूसरा, पाठ्यपुस्तक पर टिकी हुई व्यवस्था।

शिक्षा बड़े पैमाने पर समाज में व्याप्त है। समाज के हरेक वर्ग के विकास में शिक्षा की ज़रूरत है। शिक्षा के ज़रिए वो आगे बढ़ सकता है। उसकी सन्तान अधिक आमदनी या ऊँची हैसियत की कल्पना कर सकती है, अगर वह शिक्षा पाए। शिक्षा का यही एक बहुत बड़ा योगदान है कि उसने समाज को एकत्रित रखने में स्पर्धा का एक रूपक पूरे देश में फैलाया है, उसको एक सम्भव सपने की तरह विस्तारित किया है। शिक्षा ही इन सपनों की संचालिका है। और इन सपनों के ज़रिए उसने एक और गहरे स्तर पर समाज को, देश को एकत्रित रखने, कम-से-कम एक तरह के सूत्र में एकत्रित रखने का प्रयास किया।

एक और ध्रुवीकरण

कम-से-कम 1984-85 के बाद से तो ये कतई नहीं कहा जा सकता कि भारत की शासकीय व्यवस्था बाल साहित्य को लेकर उपेक्षा का दृष्टिकोण बनाए रख सकी। 'ऑपरेशन ब्लैक बोर्ड,' 80 के दशक के मध्य में एक बहुत बड़ा कार्यक्रम था, शायद शिक्षा के इतिहास में पहला बड़ा कार्यक्रम जिसके तहत बाल साहित्य की खरीद सम्भव हुई, जिसके ज़रिए इसे बहुत मात्रा में फैलाया गया। उसके बाद के जितने कार्यक्रम हैं उन सभी में बाल साहित्य के लिए पुस्तकालयों के लिए पिछले 60 वर्षों में शुरू के 40 वर्षों के मुकाबले कहीं अधिक राशि का प्रबन्धन भी हुआ और आवंटन भी हुआ। एक खास बात और कि वो राशि स्कूलों तक पहुँची भी है। एक बहुत बड़ा परिवर्तन है कि इन स्कूलों में आज आप कहीं भी जाएँ, भले ही बन्द मिलें लेकिन किताबें एक-न-

एक अलमारी में मिलेंगी। बहुत-सी जगह पर खुली भी हैं। बहुत-सी जगहों पर पढ़ी भी जाती हैं। यह सब भी एक बहुत बड़े परिवर्तन का संकेत है। लेकिन जिसको व्याप्ति कहते हैं वो आज भी नहीं है।

परीक्षा में क्या मदद करेंगी ये किताबें, माता-पिता पूछना चाहते हैं। हाँ, बच्चे खुश हैं इनको पढ़ना चाहते हैं। पालक देखता है लेकिन आश्वस्त नहीं होता कि इससे शिक्षा के उद्देश्य पूरे होंगे जिनको वो समझता है। दूसरी तरफ हम देख रहे हैं कि बाल साहित्य के ज़रिए जो आनन्द मिलता है, (जिस आनन्द का नारा सरकारी व्यवस्था लगातार दोहराती रही है - डी.पी.ई.पी. में बकायदा जॉय फुल लर्निंग का नारा लगा जैसे कि और कोई लर्निंग हो भी सकती है!) उसने भी स्कूली व्यवस्था को दो हिस्सों में बाँट दिया है। एक तरफ सरकारी स्कूल हैं जो कि शिक्षा को आनन्दमयी बनाने की बात कहते रहे हैं। दूसरी तरफ निजी स्कूल हैं जो शिक्षा को लगातार स्पर्धा का, मेहनत का, प्रतियोगिता के लिए मेहनत का, माध्यम बनाते चले गए हैं। तो मेहनत और आनन्द के बीच एक बँटवारा हुआ है जो आप मोटे तौर पर देखें तो अमीरों और गरीबों के बीच का बँटवारा है। गरीबों की शिक्षा आनन्दमयी होगी। अमीरों की शिक्षा मेहनत से भरी जो परीक्षा, प्रतियोगिता के लिए बच्चों को तैयार करेगी। आप कह सकते हैं ये भी एक काफी लाक्षणिक मामला है, हम इसको कैसे समझें। उन वर्गों में बँटते हुए समाज में शिक्षा के दो महत्वपूर्ण आयामों का यह ध्रुवीकरण हम देखते चले आ रहे हैं।

परिश्रम शिक्षा का ही एक हिस्सा है। कोई भी बच्चा, व्यक्ति शिक्षा में बहुत आगे नहीं बढ़ेगा अगर उसे परिश्रम की आदत नहीं पड़ी। परिश्रम के लिए एकाग्रता चाहिए, परिश्रम के लिए अपने उद्देश्यों को थोड़ा दूर हटकर देखने की आदत चाहिए। तुरन्त नतीजा न पाने की जगह धैर्य रखने की आदत चाहिए। वो तमाम चीज़ें मेहनत का अंग हैं। वह शिक्षा का अनिवार्य अंग है। दूसरा, आनन्द शिक्षा का अनिवार्य अंग है। ऐसी शिक्षा जो दुखी कर दे, निराश कर दे, इतना निराश कर दे कि आगे हमें कुछ दिखे ही नहीं, ऐसी शिक्षा कैसी शिक्षा हो सकती है। ये दोनों ही शिक्षा के अंग हैं लेकिन हम देखते हैं कि इनका ध्रुवीकरण सरकार और व्यवसायों के बीच, गरीबों और अमीरों के बीच हो रहा है।

साहित्य और बाल साहित्य

सोचें कि बाल साहित्य अगर साहित्य है तो फिर इसका क्या मायना बनता है। साहित्य से हम आज की परिस्थिति के बारे में क्या जान सकते हैं। अगर बाल साहित्य ऐसा साहित्य है जो बच्चे को सम्बोधित करता है, तो बच्चे की हमारे समाज में आज क्या स्थिति है।

एक बड़े परिप्रेक्ष्य में भी देखें तो बाल साहित्य का संघर्ष भी साहित्य मात्र के संघर्ष से जुड़ा नहीं है। समाज में अगर बाल साहित्य या शिक्षा व्यवस्था में बाल साहित्य की व्याप्ति को लेकर एक संकट दिखाई देता है, अवरोध दिखाई देता है तो कुछ वैसा ही अवरोध, वैसा ही संकट बल्कि शायद उससे ज़्यादा बड़ा संकट हमको साहित्य के क्षेत्र में भी दिखाई देता है। क्या स्वयं साहित्य आज भारतीय समाज का, उसके किसी भी वर्ग का एक अनिवार्य हिस्सा है?

साहित्य की ज़रूरत क्या है? किसी समाज को साहित्य की क्या आवश्यकता होती है? तमाम लोगों ने इस प्रश्न का अपने-अपने ढंग से उत्तर दिया है। कोई कहता है कि हाँ, साहित्य के ज़रिए एक परम्परा बनती है। साहित्य के ज़रिए भाषा गढ़ी जाती है, जिसमें कोई सन्देह नहीं है। साहित्य के स्वास्थ्य को जाँचने के लिए भाषा का स्वास्थ्य जाँच लेना पर्याप्त होता है। भाषा हमें बताती है कि उसके साहित्य की क्या स्थिति है। साहित्य हमें बताता है कि भाषा की क्या स्थिति है। दोनों के बीच एक गहरा रिश्ता है।

मोटे तौर पर अगर हम सहज होकर साहित्य की परिभाषा सोचना चाहें, तो आप देखेंगे कि कहीं-न-कहीं साहित्य का सन्दर्भ जीवन मात्र से है - जीवन में जो क्षण हमको सुख देते हैं, कुछ वैसा ही सुख हमें साहित्य से मिलता है। अगर आप उन क्षणों पर गौर करें तो साहित्य के स्वभाव या चरित्र की भूमिका नज़र आने लगेगी। जब हम किसी की नज़रों में नहीं होते, स्वतंत्र होते हैं, हम चैन महसूस करते हैं और वो क्षण हमें सबसे ज़्यादा सुख देते हैं। जब हमारी अपेक्षित भूमिकाओं को जाँचने वाले हमारे इर्द-गिर्द नहीं होते, वो क्षण होते हैं जिनमें हम चैन महसूस करते हैं। अगर आप साहित्य पर गौर करें, किसी भी विधा को लें - कविता को लें, कहानी को लें, नाटक को लें - तो उसमें डूबने का अर्थ यही होता है कि हम

कुछ क्षणों के लिए उन जंजीरों से मुक्त हो जाते हैं जो हमें वैसे अपेक्षित भूमिकाओं में बाँधे रखती हैं। हमें इसी स्वतंत्रता का क्षणिक ही सही, एक अहसास साहित्य दिलाता है।

साहित्य इस मुक्ति का माध्यम है। आप इस मुक्ति का माध्यम बनाने वाली कोई भी रचना इस तरह से साहित्य की श्रेणी में ला सकते हैं। साहित्य ये विशेष काम भाषा के ज़रिए करता है और उसका लम्बा-चौड़ा इतिहास है। इसलिए भाषा और साहित्य के बीच में एक गहरा रिश्ता है। भाषा स्वयं हमारी स्वतंत्रता का लक्षण है। अगर भाषा पर गौर करेंगे तो सहज ही समझ में आ जाएगा कि क्या समस्या होगी उनको जो इस भाषा का इस्तेमाल रचना के लिए कर रहे हैं। सोचने का मुद्दा है कि हमारे बीच जब साहित्य लिखा जाता है, शिक्षा में उसको स्थान देने का प्रयास होता है, तो किस-किस तरह की समस्याएँ आती हैं।

शिक्षा के कई ऐसे गुण हैं, ऐसी इसकी विशेषताएँ हैं एक व्यवस्था के रूप में, जो साहित्य के इस मुक्तिदायी स्वभाव से टकराती हैं। साहित्य अगर मुक्ति देता है, तो शिक्षा व्यवस्था नियंत्रण की ओर प्रेरित है। साहित्य अगर चयन देता है, तो शिक्षा व्यवस्था लगातार एक दबाव बनाने की चेष्टा करती है। साहित्य यदि प्रवर्तन का माध्यम है तो हर रचना के ज़रिए आपकी भाषा में एक नया प्रवर्तन कर रहा होता है। शब्द के स्तर पर, वाक्य विन्यास के स्तर पर, किसी-न-किसी स्तर पर वह कुछ नया प्रवर्तन करता है। उधर शिक्षा है जिसकी प्रवर्तित को प्रचारित करने में ही बड़ी भूमिका है। जो प्रवर्तित हो चुका है, जो तथ्य बन गया है, उसको जानना सब लोगों के लिए अनिवार्य बनाने वाली शिक्षा ही आधुनिक शिक्षा है। इस तरह के सहज अन्तर-विरोध इन दोनों के बीच में नज़र आते हैं जिनसे यह समझ में आता है कि मामला सिर्फ बाल साहित्य का नहीं है, साहित्य का भी है।

अगर आप बाल साहित्य को एक क्षण के लिए भूल जाएँ, आज से 30-40 साल पहले, बाल साहित्य का कोई मायना नहीं था लेकिन साहित्य फिर भी था। हिन्दी, अँग्रेज़ी जैसे विषयों की पढ़ाई में भाषा के अलावा साहित्य का भी एक महत्व रहता था। उस समय भी यह समस्या थी कि साहित्य को किस तरह पढ़ाया जाए। यह मतभेद हमेशा ही रहता था। साहित्य एक अपेक्षित अर्थ को जानने का ज़रिया

है - उसके ज़रिए कुछ रूपाकारों को, कुछ रूपकों को प्रचारित करने का माध्यम है। वो बच्चों को, विद्यार्थी को इस मुक्ति का छोटा-सा अनुभव देने का माध्यम है जो मनुष्य के नाते सबका अधिकार है। इसलिए साहित्य के अर्थ को लेकर, साहित्य की परीक्षा को लेकर, साहित्य पर कैसे प्रश्न पूछे जाएँ उसको लेकर लगातार काफी सघन विमर्श रहा है।

अभी हाल में मेरी भेंट श्री रतिम मुखोपाध्याय से हुई जो कि शान्ति निकेतन में काम करते हैं और यह ढूँढ़ते रहे हैं कि टैगोर ने शान्ति निकेतन में क्या-क्या किया। उनको हाल में टैगोर के अपने हाथ से लिखे हुए ऐसे अनेक प्रश्न पत्र मिले जो उन्होंने इसलिए बनाए थे जिससे लोगों को बताया जा सके कि हिन्दी साहित्य के प्रश्न पत्र इस तरह बनाए जाते हैं। वो देखते थे कि उस समय और आजकल भी साहित्य के प्रश्न पत्र इसी तरह के बनते हैं, जैसे इसका केन्द्रीय भाव बताओ या यहाँ कवि क्या कहना चाहता है। इस प्रश्न का वैसे भी सहज उत्तर यह होना चाहिए कि कवि यह जानता होता कि वो क्या कहना चाहता है, तो कविता नहीं लिखता। वह सहज ही एक चिट्ठी लिखता या गद्य में यह बता देता कि भैया मैं ये कहना चाहता हूँ। तुम समझ लेना। उसके ज़रिए तुम्हारे मन में कोई कविता बनती हो तो बना लेना।

इन तमाम बाध्यताओं के बीच परीक्षा व्यवस्था लगातार साहित्य को लहलुहान करती रही है। बहुत समय से, सौ वर्ष से अधिक हो गया। गनीमत है कि पहले केवल अँग्रेज़ी को लहलुहान करती थी। 1920 के बाद से उसने हमारी भाषाओं का भी यही हथ्र किया। जब से हिन्दी में इंटरमीडिएट परीक्षा शुरू हुई है, साहित्य की परीक्षा लेने का एक तरीका बन गया। उसके बाद साहित्य की पाठ्यपुस्तकें बनाने का एक तरीका बन गया। और बहुत-से लोग तो केवल पाठ्यपुस्तक में जा सकने वाली सामग्री को रचकर अमर होने का स्वप्न देखने लगे - पाठ्यपुस्तक के कवि, कहानीकार, व्यंग्यकार।

जब मुझे एन.सी.ई.आर.टी. में काम करने का मौका मिला तो मेरी डाक का एक काफी बड़ा हिस्सा लगातार ऐसे कवियों की रचनाएँ रहीं जो चाहते थे कि मेरे ज़रिए उनकी रचनाएँ पाठ्यपुस्तकों में पहुँच जाएँ। अब मुझे अहसास हुआ है कि एक बहुत बड़ी संख्या में कवि-समाज में ऐसे लोग हैं जो पाठ्यपुस्तकों को गम्भीरता से इसलिए लेते हैं क्योंकि

उनको लगता है कि ये प्रकाशन व्यवस्था के तंत्र से उनको मुक्ति दिला देगी। कि वे सीधे पाठ्यपुस्तक में प्रवेश कर जाएँ तो पीढ़ियों तक पढ़े जाएँगे।

कुछ कवि ऐसे हैं जो प्रवेश पाकर पढ़े गए, बहुत लम्बे समय तक। मसला इस पूरी व्यवस्था में साहित्य की आत्मा का, साहित्य की आत्मा को शिक्षा में समझने वालों का है। रवीन्द्र नाथ ठाकुर ने ज़ाहिर है, उस चीज़ को अपनी ही संस्था बनाकर समझ लिया था, कि जब ये काव्य, कहानी, उनकी अपनी रचनाएँ परीक्षा की चकराघिन्नी से गुज़रेंगी तो इनका क्या हाल होगा। तो उन्होंने कुछ के प्रश्न पत्र बनाकर दिखाने की कोशिश की कि साहित्य का जब हम इम्तिहान लें तो कतई ज़रूरी नहीं है कि हम इसे भी उस तरह से लें जिस तरह से तथ्य-केन्द्रित शिक्षा अन्य विषयों का इम्तिहान लेती है। क्योंकि साहित्य का तथ्य अगर कोई है, तो वह कल्पना ही है, जो कि मूलतः एक तथ्य-विरोधी क्षमता है। जिसको ईश्वर ने मनुष्य में इसी नाते प्रत्यारोपित किया होगा कि प्रकृति को देखकर मनुष्य लगातार अपनी दुनिया को बदलते रहने के लिए या कम-से-कम उसके स्वप्न देखते रहने लिए स्वतंत्र रहेगा।

साहित्य उसी की रक्षा करने के लिए लगातार संघर्षरत रहता है। इसी कारण शिक्षा व्यवस्था के साथ उसकी टकराहट बनी रहती है। कि वो कल्पना की बात कर रहा है और शिक्षा बुद्धि की बात कर रही है। वो आगे की बात कर रहा है, शिक्षा पीछे की बात कर रही है। वो ऐसी बातें कर रहा है जो दुनिया में नहीं हैं। शिक्षा उन बातों को कर रही है जो कि तथ्य हैं, दुनिया उसे मान रही है। इस वजह से कई समस्याएँ साहित्य के साथ पैदा होती हैं। उनमें से कई समस्याएँ बाल साहित्य को भी भोगनी पड़ती हैं। इसलिए इस ज़्यादा बड़े परिवार के साथ अगर बाल साहित्य के प्रति चिन्तित लोग रहे हैं, रहेंगे तो मैं समझता हूँ कि वे रणनीति बेहतर बना सकेंगे, क्योंकि कई बड़े सवाल हैं जो सिर्फ छोटे बच्चों के लिए नहीं हैं। सीधे उच्च शिक्षा तक ये सवाल जाते हैं। जब साहित्य शिक्षा में आता है तो उसका क्या होता है? क्या वो यह मौका देता है कि हम साहित्य को अपने-अपने ढंग से पढ़ सकें, उसका कोई एक ही अर्थ न निकालें? क्या वह हमें यह मौका देता है कि हम समालोचना के ज़रिए पैदा की गई बहुत तरह की लकीरों के पार जा सकें और स्वयं

अपने भीतर पैदा हुई प्रतिक्रियाओं को, अभिक्रियाओं को चिन्हित कर सकें कि ये क्षमताएँ साहित्य की पढ़ाई से उत्पन्न होती हैं? ये मसले बाल साहित्य के बहुत करीब हैं। इसलिए बहुत ज़रूरी है कि हम बाल साहित्य की बहस को और शिक्षा के साथ उसके रिश्ते को इन बहसों के साथ चलाएँ।

बाल साहित्य की ज़रूरत

‘बाल साहित्य’, बच्चों का साहित्य। क्या ज़रूरत है हमको बच्चों के अलग से साहित्य की? इस प्रश्न पर दरअसल हमने अपने परिवेश में विचार नहीं किया। हम लोगों ने सोचा कि दुनिया के और देशों में बाल साहित्य होता है तो हमारे यहाँ भी होना चाहिए। उससे बाल साहित्य की शक्ति भी कुछ इस तरह से बन गई है कि जैसा वहाँ होता है वैसा हमारे यहाँ होना चाहिए। इस पर बहुत कम लोगों ने गौर किया है कि दरअसल बाल साहित्य दुनिया के हर देश में नहीं लिखा गया।

अगर आप यूरोप के दो प्रमुख देशों पर ही विचार करें, ब्रिटेन और फ्रांस। दोनों ही बहुत बड़ी औपनिवेशिक शक्तियाँ रही हैं। दोनों ही भाषाओं के साहित्य के साथ कुछ समय बिताएँ या उनकी किताबें देखें तो आप थोड़ा हैरत में पड़ जाएँगे। जहाँ एक तरफ 19वीं सदी का ब्रिटेन बाल साहित्य के विषय की दृष्टि से बहुत ही उर्वर सिद्ध हुआ, वहीं फ्रांस में बाल साहित्य के नाम पर कुछ विशेष नहीं हुआ। बल्कि 20-25 वर्षों से बाल साहित्य को लेकर फ्रांस में एक विमर्श चल रहा है और कुछ लोग कोशिश करते रहे हैं कि हम बच्चों के लिए अलग से कुछ लिखें। आज भी फ्रांस में उस तरह से बाल साहित्य का कोई लम्बा-चौड़ा विस्तार नहीं है, न ही कोई इतिहास है। बच्चों के लिए किताबें हैं लेकिन अगर इनकी तुलना ब्रिटेन के बाल साहित्य से करेंगे तो आप उसे विपन्न पाएँगे, भले ही फ्रांस के लोग कभी नहीं मानते कि हम किसी भी दृष्टि से विपन्न हैं। बहरहाल मेरा उद्देश्य यह था कि हम इस पर विचार करें कि बाल साहित्य किन परिस्थितियों में जन्म लेता है। क्यों जन्म लेता है। इस तुलना से शायद हमें इस प्रश्न का उत्तर देने में कुछ मदद मिले।

कुछ और देशों की तरफ गौर करें तो आप कुछ और पाएँगे, जैसे रूस में रूसी क्रांति के बाद बाल साहित्य को

एक तरह की मुहिम बनाया गया। उस मुहिम के ज़रिए बहुत सारा बाल साहित्य लिखा गया। उसमें से काफी बाल साहित्य हमारे देश में भारत-सोवियत मैत्री के तहत आज़ादी के बाद के लगभग तीन-साढ़े तीन दशकों तक, बड़े पैमाने पर प्रसारित किया गया जब तक सोवियत संघ का विघटन नहीं हो गया। अगर कोई भारतीय बाल साहित्य प्रकाशन उद्योग की अर्थ-व्यवस्था का अध्ययन करेगा तो वह ज़रूर यह महसूस करेगा कि इस अर्थ-व्यवस्था में खेलने के लिए समतल मैदान नहीं था। कोई कितना भी अच्छा बाल साहित्य का प्रकाशक होता वो सोवियत संघ से आई सरकारी सबसिडी प्राप्त, रंग-बिरंगी, अच्छे कागज़ पर छपी हुई किताबों की कीमतों का मुकाबला नहीं कर सकता था। इसलिए 50 के, 60 के और 70 के दशकों में आज़ादी के पहले से विकसित हो चुका बाल साहित्य का हिन्दी उद्योग, पल्लवित होने की बजाय मुरझाता चला गया और एक के बाद एक पत्रिकाएँ बन्द होती चली गईं। कई प्रकाशन समूह तो बिल्कुल ही बन्द हो गए या बाल साहित्य को छापना उन्होंने बन्द कर दिया। शायद सबसे मशहूर किस्सा इंडियन प्रेस, इलाहाबाद का है। इस बीच सोवियत साहित्य फैला, प्रसारित हुआ। बहुत-से लोगों ने उसी को बाल साहित्य के प्रसार का मानक बना लिया। चूँकि उसके साथ कई और चीज़ें जुड़ी हुई थीं; प्रगतिशीलता की अवधारणा जुड़ी हुई थी, बहुत-सी प्रेरणा का स्रोत भी सोवियत संघ था, उन कारणों से ही उस साहित्य का प्रसार हुआ। पर कीमत भी एक बहुत बड़ा कारण था। फ्रांस, जर्मनी आदि देशों की तुलना में ब्रिटेन में 19वीं सदी व उसके बाद से लगातार और सोवियत संघ में मुख्यतः 1920 के बाद, बाल साहित्य के लिए सबसे उपयुक्त समय सिद्ध हुआ।

बच्चों का बचपन

जिसको हम बालक या बालिका कहते हैं, बच्चा कहते हैं, भारत वर्ष की बहुत लम्बी सभ्यता के इतिहास में उसका सामाजिक जन्म अभी पूरी तरह होना बाकी है। बहुत बड़े मनोवैज्ञानिक सुधीर कक्कड़ अपने ढंग से इस बात को कहते रहे हैं कि दरअसल हमारे समाज में शैशव की अवधारणा तो है, लेकिन बचपन की नहीं है। और किशोरावस्था की तो लगभग नहीं के बराबर है। अभी ये केवल शब्द हैं जिनको शिक्षा शास्त्र का हिस्सा बनाया जाता है। तीन-चार वर्ष की

आयु बीतने के बाद से हमारे समाज, हमारे परिवार में बच्चे से की जाने वाली अपेक्षाएँ दरअसल उसे वयस्क बनाने की तैयारी होती हैं। वे बचपन को स्वीकृति नहीं देतीं। लड़कियों के बचपन को तो उस समय भी स्वीकृति नहीं देतीं जब वे शैशव काल में होती हैं। बांग्ला में बचपन के लिए ऐसा कोई शब्द ही नहीं है जो लड़कियों को भी शामिल कर सके। छेले बैला जो शब्द है वह मुख्यतः लड़कों के लिए है, “लड़कों का यह बचपन होता है।” अन्नपूर्णा देवी के उपन्यास आपको याद दिलाते हैं कि लड़कियों का तो कोई बचपन होता नहीं है।

बाल विवाह की दृष्टि से देखें तो हमारे सामने तकलीफ और उत्पीड़न का एक बहुत भयानक इतिहास है जो भारत की संस्कृति का, आधुनिक युग की संस्कृति का भी इतिहास है, जिसके ज़रिए आधा बचपन तो गायब हो जाता है। 5 से 11 या 12 के वर्ष - जिन्हें अँग्रेज़ी भाषी दुनिया में सबसे सुनहरे वर्ष बताया जाता है, उनका हमारे समाज में सामाजिक रूप से गढ़ा जाना शुरू तो हो सका है, परन्तु यह अभी बहुत विकसित नहीं हो पाया है। मनोविज्ञान में अनेक व्याख्याएँ की गई हैं कि ये वो वर्ष हैं जिनमें जीवन के शैशवकाल की यौनिकता नीचे चली जाती है और एक उद्यमी बच्चे का उदय होता है जो हर चीज़ छूना, उलटना-पलटना, दुनिया को समझना चाहता है। उसके बारे में बोलना चाहता है, सुनना चाहता है। तरह-तरह का वह विस्तार कर रहा होता है। वह अपनी गति बढ़ाना चाहता है। नए-नए यंत्रों के ज़रिए वो दुनिया पर काबू पाना चाहता है। यही वो वर्ष हैं जिन वर्षों में स्कूल शुरू होता है और स्कूल अपने ढंग से बच्चे को सम्भालना शुरू करता है।

बचपन की अवधारणा और स्कूल

अगर आप प्राथमिक स्कूल के इन वर्षों पर विचार करें जो 5-6 वर्ष से शुरू होते हैं, आजकल तो प्राथमिक से भी पहले ही स्कूल शुरू हो जाता है। इसलिए बहुत-से लोग कहेंगे कि आप तीन साल से शुरू करिए, फिर भी अगर आप 4-5 साल से भी शुरू करें और गौर करें कि इन वर्षों में क्या समस्याएँ हैं शिक्षा के सामने, तो आप पाएँगे कि सबसे बड़ी समस्या ही यही है कि प्रशिक्षित शिक्षक भी नहीं समझता है कि इन वर्षों से गुज़रा हुआ बालक इन वर्षों की विशेषताओं

में बहुत वर्षों तक नहीं रहता। ये एक तरह का दौर है जिससे बच्चा गुज़र रहा है। दरअसल उसका जीवन इसके बाद शुरू होगा।

इन वर्षों में बच्चे सब कुछ करना चाहते हैं। हरेक अनुभव से गुज़रना चाहते हैं। लेकिन हमारे समाज में इन वर्षों में जब कोई बच्चा किसी चीज़ में बहुत ज़्यादा रुचि लेता है, तो हम सोचते हैं कि वो वैसा ही कुछ बनना चाहता है जिस चीज़ में वो रुचि ले रहा है। जबकि वो केवल उन चीज़ों से गुज़रना चाहता है। हो सकता है एक-दो साल के लिए चित्रकला में बहुत रुचि ले, तो हमें लगने लगता है कि यह चित्रकार बनने जा रहा है तो हम उसे चित्रकला में आगे बढ़ाएँ। और हम देखते हैं कि बच्चा छह-आठ महीने बाद चित्र बनाना छोड़ देता है। हम निराश होते हैं कि हमने इतना पैसा खर्च किया। उसके लिए ब्रश लाए, रंग लाए, कागज़ लाए - ये सब हुआ लेकिन उसने इस चीज़ को भी छोड़ दिया। बच्चा एक क्रम से गुज़र रहा है जिसमें वो अनेक मनोदशाओं से गुज़रेगा क्योंकि वो जीवन के तमाम आयामों को अपने स्तर पर छू रहा है।

इसके ज़रिए ही संज्ञानात्मक विकास होगा। राष्ट्रीय पाठ्यचर्या की रूप रेखा जब लिखी जा रही थी तो इन वर्षों के बारे में भी कुछ पंक्तियाँ लिखनी थीं। बहुत-से लोग तो इन पंक्तियों को शुरू से ही विवादग्रस्त वातावरण में महसूस कर रहे थे। विशेषज्ञों ने यह लिखा कि कक्षा 1 से लेकर 4 तक मेहरबानी कर के बच्चे की किसी गलती को मत सुधारिए, न ही उसको बताइए कि वर्तनी में ये गलतियाँ हो रही हैं, उच्चारण में वो गलतियाँ हो रही हैं, या वाक्य विन्यास में यह गलती हो रही है, कुछ भी मत बताइए। उसको लिखने दीजिए, बोलने दीजिए, पढ़ने दीजिए, सुनने दीजिए। चौथी कक्षा से जब वो गुज़र जाए तब फिर इन सब चीज़ों के बारे में समय निकालिएगा और वो भी एक-एक करके, इकट्ठा मत ठीक कर दीजिएगा कि बिलकुल आप उसको रीडर की जगह प्रूफ-रीडर बना दें।

कुछ इस तरह का मामला हमारे स्कूलों में होता है। आप जाते हैं कक्षा 1 में, बच्चे स्कूल में आकर अभी-अभी बोलने की कोशिश कर रहे हैं लेकिन सबसे पहले हमारा ध्यान उनके उच्चारण पर जाने लगता है। बड़ी मुश्किल से दो-दो, तीन-

तीन अक्षरों के शब्द बना रहे हैं और अभी से अक्षरों की आकृतियों को लेकर हम चिन्तित हैं या मात्राओं के सहीपन को लेकर चिन्तित हैं इत्यादि। ये सब चीज़ें दिखाती हैं कि समाज में बच्चे के इन वर्षों को लेकर ऐसी कोई व्यापक समझ नहीं है और न ही शिक्षकों में ऐसी समझ है कि ये वर्ष दरअसल उगने के वर्ष हैं। फलने, फूलने, फैलने के वर्ष हैं। इन वर्षों में बच्चों में क्षमताओं का विस्तार होगा। और जब वह विस्तार होता है तो ज़ाहिर है कि गलतियाँ होती हैं, चोटें भी लगती हैं। तरह-तरह की विकृतियाँ भी उत्पन्न होती हैं। पर भगवान ने उन्हें बहुत समय दिया है, इन्हें ठीक करने के लिए।

अब अगर हम विश्वासपूर्वक इन वर्षों में बच्चों को उगने दें, इस दृष्टिकोण से अगर देखें तो आप पाएँगे कि जिसको हम बचपन कहते हैं दरअसल हमारे समाज में अभी उसका आविर्भाव हो रहा है। हम किस तरह का उसका आविर्भाव कर रहे हैं? फिलहाल उसका आविर्भाव केवल कानूनी मदद से कर पा रहे हैं। यह अपने आप में एक बहुत बड़ा चिन्ता का लक्षण है कि कानून से जब किसी चीज़ की शुरुआत होती है, तो वो चीज़ समाज में, संस्कृति में व्यापकता पाते-पाते बहुत समय लेती है। यह चीज़ हमने कई माध्यमों से जानी है। जैसे कि हमने देखा कि 19वीं सदी के उत्तरार्ध में एक कानून बना था कि छोटी बच्चियों की हत्या नहीं करना चाहिए। लेकिन आज, सौ वर्ष बाद छोटी बच्चियों की भ्रूण में ही हत्या नए सिरे से जन्म ले रही है। वो कानून समाज और संस्कृति में व्याप्त नहीं हो सका।

इन तमाम चीज़ों को हमें इसलिए सोचना होगा क्योंकि हम जिस चीज़ को आज थोड़ा-बहुत अपने बीच पा रहे हैं यानी बचपन की अवधारणा, उसको लेकर हमें स्वयं सोचना है कि अभी यह बहुत ही नाजुक पौधा है जिसके इर्द-गिर्द बाड़ लगानी होगी तब जाकर वो किसी हद तक पल्लवित हो पाएगा। बचपन की अवधारणा के हिसाब से अगर भारत के आज के समाज पर गौर करें तो आप देखेंगे कि उसकी सम्भावनाएँ ही देश के करोड़ों बच्चों के लिए बहुत ही क्षीण हैं। भारत में कुपोषण के आँकड़े कहते हैं कि 75 प्रतिशत से ऊपर बच्चे 6 से 8 वर्ष की आयु में कुपोषित पाए जाते हैं। लड़कियों में यह आँकड़ा 85 प्रतिशत से ऊपर है। ऐसी स्थिति में जब बच्चे के स्वास्थ्य को समाज इतनी उपेक्षा की

दृष्टि से देखता है, खासकर गरीबों के बच्चों को, तो ज़ाहिर है कि बचपन के वर्ष अभी हमारे लिए राष्ट्रीय चिन्ता के वर्ष नहीं बने, केवल कानूनी चिन्ता के वर्ष बने हैं। कानून कहता है कि 8 वर्ष की स्कूली शिक्षा हर बच्चे का बुनियादी अधिकार है। इस कानून को लेकर भी तमाम तरह की बहसों अभी भी चल रही हैं, लेकिन इस कानून के ज़रिए कम-से-कम यह स्वीकारा गया है कि हाँ, बच्चे का भी कोई अधिकार होता है। उसके लिए कुछ और लोग लड़ सकते हैं, बच्चा स्वयं भले न लड़ सके।

हमारे जो साथी बाल साहित्य की शिक्षा के साथ व्याप्ति को लेकर चिन्तित हैं, उनको यह ज़्यादा बृहत्तर दृश्य देखकर कुछ-न-कुछ सांत्वना और प्रेरणा भी ग्रहण करना चाहिए कि यह एक शुरुआत है बहुत बड़े समाज में, जहाँ अभी बहुत-सी बुनियादी समस्याएँ हैं। उस समाज में बच्चे की अवधारणा बहुत आहिस्ता-आहिस्ता तमाम तरह के अवरोधों के साथ आगे बढ़ रही है। एक जैविक अवधारणा सामाजिक अवधारणा में तब्दील हो रही है कि बच्चा सिर्फ एक जैविक छोटा प्राणी नहीं है जो कि बड़े का एक छोटा संस्करण हो, उसका अलग व्यक्तित्व है। प्लेटो ने दो सहस्राब्दि पहले कहा था कि बच्चा दरअसल बड़ों के बीच एक विदेशी की तरह होता है, जैसे आप किसी विदेशी से जिसकी भाषा आपको न आती हो। जब वे बात करते हैं तो एक-दूसरे को कुछ समझते हैं, कुछ नहीं समझते हैं, और इस तरीके से जो आदान-प्रदान होता है वह आधा-अधूरा ही रहता है। प्लेटो ने ज़रूर इस रूपक को यह सब सोचकर रखा होगा कि जब बच्चों से लोग बात करते हैं तो ये न सोचें कि ये मेरी बात को समझेगा और मैं इसकी बात को समझूँगा। उनके बीच में ये गुंजाइश रहे कि वे दोनों ही एक-दूसरे की बात को नहीं समझ पाएँगे। सम्प्रेषण का एक बहुत बड़ा क्षेत्र अँधेरे में ही रहेगा। ज़ाहिर है, उस समय इतना मनोविज्ञान विकसित नहीं हुआ था कि प्लेटो यह समझ सकता कि क्यों अँधेरा रहता है। लेकिन उसने फिर भी एक बहुत बड़ी बात कही थी और इस आधार पर यह अनुशंसा भी की थी कि अपने बीच में जैसा सम्मान हम विदेशियों को देते हैं, वैसा ही सम्मान हमें बच्चों को भी देना चाहिए। अभी तो समझ में नहीं आ रहा है, लेकिन क्या पता बाद में वही सही निकले। वैसे भी बाद में वही रहेगा, हम तो रहेंगे नहीं।

पिछले 2000 सालों में ऐसे कई लोग हुए जिन्होंने हमें याद दिलाया कि बच्चों को गम्भीरता से लेने की ज़रूरत है। अगर सूर के शब्दों पर विचार करें जिन्होंने अपने पदों के ज़रिए बच्चों की झूठ बोलने की प्रवृत्ति पर, बहाना बनाने, छिपने की प्रवृत्ति पर विचार किया था और यशोदा को एक ऐसी माँ के रूप में स्थापित किया जो ये सब सहन करती हैं और बहाना सुन के कहती नहीं हैं कि मुझे पता है कि ये तुम्हारा बहाना है बल्कि गले लगा लेती हैं, तो सूर कौन-सा रूपक रच रहे थे। वो वही रूपक रच रहे थे कि बच्चों की दुनिया में लोकपाल बनने की कोशिश मत कीजिए। उनको छिपने की जगह दीजिए। उनको झूठ बोलने की जगह दीजिए। उनको बहाना बनाने की जगह दीजिए। उनको अपनी कल्पना की दुनिया में रहने का मौका दीजिए। इसको लेकर अनेक परम्पराएँ हैं, लोक आख्यान हैं, कोई कमी नहीं है।

एक कहानी - कुछ विचार



मिसाल के तौर पर आप पंचतंत्र की लोकप्रिय कहानी 'खरगोश और शेर' पर विचार करें। मूल रूप से इसमें क्या होता है? खरगोश वहाँ एक बच्चे की तरह से है जिसके लिए यह तय कर दिया गया है कि आज वह शेर के हाथों मारा जाने वाला है। खरगोश के पास अनुभव नहीं है। क्या होता है शेर और शेर के सामने जाना, ये सब उसको नहीं पता है। ज़ाहिर है, माता-पिता उस दिन मायूस होंगे। हम तो अपने बच्चे को भेज रहे हैं। सोचा होगा क्यों उसे नाश्ता खिलाएँ, बरबाद करें। उसको तो मरना ही है। लेकिन खरगोश चूँकि उस अनुभव से मुक्त है, इसलिए उसके मन में उस तरह के भाव नहीं हैं। वह देख रहा है कि माता-पिता बहुत घबराए हुए हैं। ज़ाहिर है कि कुछ-न-कुछ संकट होगा। वह रास्ते में क्या करता है, पंचतंत्र की कथा हमें नहीं बताती, सिर्फ इतना बताती है कि जब वह पहुँचा दोपहर में, तब उसने क्या किया।

ये बताती है कि उसने शेर से कहा कि रास्ते में इसलिए हमें देर हो गई क्योंकि रास्ते में आपके जैसा एक और प्राणी हमें पानी में दिखाई दिया। आप जानते ही हैं कि शेर होने का अर्थ ही यही होता है कि प्रतिद्वन्द्विता स्वीकार न हो। इसलिए शेर ने कहा, "पहले उससे निपट लूँ।" इस बहाने खरगोश उसको कुएँ के पास ले गया जहाँ शेर को अपनी आकृति दिखाई दी। वह कूद पड़ा पानी में और मर गया, ये कहानी है।

जो इस कहानी को किताब के रूप में छापते हैं, नीचे लिखते हैं कि इस कहानी से आपको क्या शिक्षा मिलती है। तो उत्तर यही होगा कि इस कहानी से हमको यह शिक्षा मिलती है कि झूठ बोलकर जीवन की रक्षा की जा सकती है। लेकिन अगर आप थोड़ा और गौर से विचार करें कि क्या किया होगा इस खरगोश ने, तो दो सम्भावनाएँ बनती हैं। या तो उसने देखा होगा कि जब भूख लगती है और भूख बहुत समय तक लगी रहती है तो लोगों का अपने ऊपर से नियंत्रण खो जाता है। उसने घर में ज़रूर देखा होगा कि पिताजी खासकर आग बबूला हो जाते हैं अगर खाना थोड़ी देर से बने, या ठीक से न बना हो। तो उसने सोचा होगा कि मैं और कुछ तो कर नहीं सकता। मुझे बता रहे हैं कि शेर ने मुझे खाने के लिए बुलाया है तो क्यों नहीं मैं थोड़ा देर से जाऊँ। क्योंकि खरगोश के लिए, आपको पता है कि देर से चलना बड़ा मुश्किल काम है। स्वाभाविक गति उसकी बड़ी तेज़ है। तो उसने अपने ऊपर नियंत्रण किया होगा कि मैं किसी तरह से देर से पहुँचूँ जिससे शेर इतना क्रोधित हो जाए कि क्रोध में आपा खो बैठे। और फिर मैं उनसे कुछ भी नहीं कहूँगा, देखा जाएगा। या तो उसकी कुछ यह रणनीति रही होगी कि भई सुबह-सुबह न पहुँचें, दोपहर में पहुँचें। थोड़ी गर्मी भी हो जाएगी तब वह भूख के मारे पागल भी हो जाएगा।

या मेरी एक और थीसिस है इसको लेकर। मेरा अनुमान है कि इस खरगोश को, जैसा कि बच्चों का स्वभाव होता है आसपास डोलते-मण्डराते चीज़ों को देखते रहने का, तो उसे जंगल का ज्ञान खूब था कि कहाँ क्या है और ज़रूर रास्ते में ऐसा कोई कुआँ उसने कई बार इधर-उधर मण्डराते हुए देखा होगा। ऐसे अवसरों पर जब आदमी थोड़ा चिन्तित हो, ऐसी जगह पर जाता है। तो हो सकता है यह खरगोश उस दिन वहाँ गया हो और वहाँ अचानक उसके मन में आर्किमिडीज़ की तरह यह सिद्धान्त आया हो कि अपनी छाया अपने जैसी

दिखाई देती है और अपनी छाया से बड़े-बड़े भी मोहित हो जाते हैं। पंचतंत्र के समय नार्सिस का जो आख्यान है, ज़रूर जीवित रहा होगा। वो विश्व का पहला ऐसा मनुष्य कहा जाता है जो अपनी ही आकृति से मोहित हो गया। हमारे समय में इतनी बड़ी-बड़ी अभिनेत्रियाँ, इतने अभिनेता उस परम्परा में चल रहे हैं। उस खरगोश ने जब उस परिचित पानी में अपने को देखा होगा तो उसको लगा होगा कि यह हो सकता है, यह विचार उसे आया हो। यह विचार उसके मन में आता ही नहीं अगर उसकी दिनचर्या किसी स्कूल से घिरी होती। अगर वह मण्डराने के लिए, इधर-उधर समय बिताने के लिए स्वतंत्र न होता। इधर-उधर यूँ ही घूमते रहने के लिए, आवारा होकर घूमने के लिए समय न होता, तो उसको अन्दाज़ ही नहीं होता कि कहाँ-कहाँ कितने कुएँ हैं। कितने सूखे हुए हैं, कितने में कितना पानी है जहाँ पर ऐसा किया जा सकता है। बहरहाल, इस कहानी से हम अन्त में पाते हैं कि दरअसल कोई ऐसी स्पष्ट शिक्षा नहीं मिलती जिसको हम नैतिक शिक्षा कह सकें। बहुत-से लोग यह कहते हैं कि इसका सार संक्षेप इस तरह का होना चाहिए कि अक्ल बड़ी होती है। शेर बाहुबली था लेकिन खरगोश अक्लमन्द था। तब अक्ल का इस्तेमाल उसने कैसे किया। क्या आपके संस्कारी ढंग से किया? या उसने कुछ गलत ढंग से किया और एक स्थिति पर विजय पाई? जब हम इस तरह के प्रश्नों से जूझते हैं तो हम पाते हैं दरअसल साहित्य हमको कोई ऐसा उत्तर नहीं देता। अच्छा साहित्य वास्तव में मुक्ति की गाथा है जिसका कोई संक्षेप सम्भव नहीं है। उसका लक्षण ही यही है।

इस दृष्टिकोण से जब हम देखते हैं और अपने बच्चों के बचपन पर विचार करते हैं तो हम ज़रूर यह समझ सकते हैं कि अगर बाल साहित्य के रास्ते में इतने अवरोध हैं तो ये अवरोध हटाना स्कूल की दैनन्दिनी को लचीला किए बगैर, शिक्षक के दिमाग को थोड़ा-सा खोले बगैर, अफसरों-मंत्रियों की पूरी व्यवस्था के चरित्र को थोड़ा और मानवीय बनाए बगैर सम्भव नहीं है। हम जहाँ-जहाँ पुस्तकालय की जगह बनाने की कोशिश कर रहे हैं वहाँ-वहाँ दरअसल हमारे ये अतिरिक्त कर्म हैं जो हमें करने ही होंगे। संवाद के स्तर पर, लेखन के स्तर पर, एक माहौल बनाने के स्तर पर हम बच्चे की अवधारणा, खासकर बचपन की अवधारणा का भी विस्तार करते रहें। विकास करते रहें। लड़के और लड़कियों के सन्दर्भ में उसकी अलग-अलग व्याख्या करते रहें, और

समाज को याद दिलाते रहें कि अभी यह सपना कितना लम्बा है जिसकी शुरुआत अभी हो रही है। और कितनी तरह के अवरोध इसके रास्ते में हैं जो कि शिक्षा से पैदा किए हुए नहीं हैं, जो संस्कृति के पैदा किए हुए हैं। तभी इन अवरोधों को थोड़ा-थोड़ा खोला जा सकेगा।

साहित्य का सम्मोहन

एन.सी.ई.आर.टी. में काम करते हुए मैंने इस कहानी को बच्चों को कई बार सुनाया। हर बृहस्पतिवार को, हमारे परिसर में ही एक स्कूल था। वहाँ कक्षा-1 में एक कहानी सुनाता था। पर इसको कहने का एक दिन का ऐसा मौका मिला जिससे मुझे लगा कि जैसे भाषा, बच्चों का मनोविज्ञान, साहित्य और दुनिया से इनका सम्बन्ध मेरे लिए एकाएक खुल गए, जो मैंने पढ़ते हुए, रिसर्च करते हुए कभी नहीं सोचा था। केवल कहानी नहीं, यह कहानी शंकर की लिखी हुई लोक कथा 'बुढ़िया की रोटी' है।

कहानी कुछ यूँ है कि एक गाँव में एक बुढ़िया रहती थी। झोपड़ी के सामने उसने एक चूल्हा बना रखा था। एक दिन सुबह उठकर जैसे ही उसने रोटी बनाई, उस झोपड़ी के सामने खड़े नीम पर रहने वाला कौआ अचानक रोटी को झपट के सीधे नीम के ऊपर जा बैठा। बुढ़िया बहुत परेशान हुई। उसने पेड़ के पास जाकर पेड़ से कहा कि तुम अपनी डालियाँ ज़ोर-ज़ोर से हिलाओ कि कौआ मेरी रोटी दे दे। तो पेड़ ने कहा कि माताजी मैं तो अपनी डालियाँ तभी हिला पाता हूँ जब ज़ोर से हवा चले, मैं खुद तो नहीं हिला पाऊँगा। ऐसा कुछ उसने कहा होगा यह मैं कल्पना कर रहा हूँ। और कौआ तो यहाँ रहता है अगर मैं ज़ोर से डालियाँ हिलाता हूँ तो उसका घोंसला गिर पड़ेगा तो यह तो मुझसे नहीं होगा। माफ कीजिए। बुढ़िया बहुत हैरान हुई कि मैं इसके सामने ही रहती हूँ और फिर भी मेरी बात नहीं मान रहा है।

वृक्षों के अमर शत्रु हैं लकड़हारे और गाँव में भी एक लकड़हारा रहता था। बुढ़िया अपनी लाठी टेकती हुई लकड़हारे के घर गई। लकड़हारा अभी-अभी उठा था कि बुढ़िया ने आकर दरवाज़े पर ज़ोर से दस्तक दी। वह आया और पूछा कि माताजी क्या बात है, सुबह-सुबह? बुढ़िया ने कहा कि मैं एक रोटी बना रही थी। रोटी जैसे ही बनी कौआ



‘बुढ़िया की रोटी’ से एक चित्र
(सम्भार – एन. बी. टी.)

ले नीम के पेड़ पर बैठ गया। मैंने पेड़ से कहा कि तुम अपनी डालियाँ हिलाओ लेकिन वह मेरी बात नहीं मान रहा है। तो लकड़हारे ने कहा कि माताजी मैं क्या करूँ? तो तुम अपनी कुल्हाड़ी लेकर जाओ और पेड़ को धमकाओ कि मैं तुम्हें काट दूँगा अगर तुम कौए से नहीं कहोगे कि रोटी गिराओ। तो लकड़हारे ने कहा कि माताजी इतना प्रचार हो रहा है कि पेड़ नहीं काटने चाहिए, मैं तो बड़ी मुश्किल से अपनी आजीविका चला रहा हूँ। जंगल में जाकर काटता हूँ, ये तो अपने गाँव का पेड़ है, इसे कैसे काटूँगा? ये तो मुझसे नहीं होगा। शंकर ने इतने विस्तार से नहीं कहा है। मैं लकड़हारे का विमर्श थोड़ा फैला रहा हूँ। पर्यावरण का युग है। इसलिए लकड़हारा चिन्तित हुआ हो। बहरहाल, लकड़हारे ने कहा कि माताजी मैं यह काम नहीं कर पाऊँगा।

बुढ़िया और दुखी हुई। बुजुर्गों की बात नहीं मानते हैं। ये लोग बिलकुल ही सीधे-सीधे अवज्ञा पर उतर आए हैं। तो उसको याद आया कि आसपास चूहे का एक बिल है। तो बुढ़िया चूहे के पास गई, उसने कहा निकलो बाहर, मेरी मदद करो। चूहे ने कहा, मैं आपकी क्या मदद कर सकता हूँ? मुझे तो आप हमेशा ही भगती रहती हैं। बुढ़िया

ने पूरी कहानी सुनाई। मैंने रोटी बनाई, कौआ मेरी रोटी लेकर पेड़ के ऊपर बैठ गया। मैंने पेड़ से कहा कि तुम ज़ोर-ज़ोर से अपनी डालियाँ हिलाओ मगर वो मानता नहीं है। फिर मैं लकड़हारे के पास गई। वो भी नहीं मानता कि पेड़ को काटने की धमकी दे। तो चूहे ने कहा कि मैं क्या करूँ? बुढ़िया बोली तुम लकड़हारे के घर पर जाकर उसकी मूँछ कुतर दो। तो शायद मान जाए। तो चूहे ने कहा, मैं तो पनीर खाता हूँ, कपड़े खाता हूँ, अच्छी-अच्छी रोटी खाता हूँ। लेकिन मूँछ कुतरने की कोशिश करूँगा तो मेरे दाँत ही टूट जाएँगे। तो मुझसे नहीं होगा। तो बुढ़िया और भी ज़्यादा दुखी हुई।

उसे ध्यान आया कि मन्दिर के पास एक बिल्ली रहती है। वो वहाँ पहुँची, तो बिल्ली उस समय मुण्डेर पर बैठी हुई थी। बुढ़िया ने उसके पास जाकर पूरी कहानी सुनाई कि मेरी रोटी कौआ ले गया। पेड़ अपनी डालियाँ नहीं हिला रहा है। लकड़हारा पेड़ को धमकी देने को तैयार नहीं है। चूहा उसकी मूँछ कुतरने के लिए तैयार नहीं है। तो तुम चूहे को खा जाओ। चूहे के पीछे भागो। तो वह मान जाएगा। तो बिल्ली ने कहा, चूहा जिसकी तुम बात कर रही हो, बीमार-सा है, छोटा-सा है। और अभी सुबह का समय है तो इतनी जल्दी नहीं कर पाऊँगी। इस तरह उसने कुछ बहाना बनाया और माताजी को उसने भी निराश कर दिया।

इस समय बुढ़िया को याद आया कि मन्दिर के पीछे एक कुत्ता रहता है। कुत्ते को वो कभी-कभी रोटी भी देती थी। तो वह कुत्ते के पास गई और उसने पूरी कहानी सुनाई। देखिए, अनहोनी वफा का मामला है। कुत्ता मान गया और कुत्ता बिल्ली के पीछे भागा। बिल्ली चूहे के पीछे भागी। चूहा लकड़हारे के घर में घुसने लगा। पीछे-पीछे माताजी आ रही थीं। लकड़हारा समझ गया कि यह वही चूहा है जो मेरी मूँछ काटने आ रहा है। लकड़हारे ने अपनी कुल्हाड़ी उठाई और वह पेड़ की तरफ गया। पेड़ भी हैरान हो गया कि लकड़हारा अपने गाँव का पेड़ काटने आ पहुँचा है, पता नहीं क्या होगा। तो उसने ज़ोर-ज़ोर से अपनी डालियाँ हिलाईं। और कौए को डर लगा, सचमूच में ये घोंसला नहीं गिर पड़े। कौए ने रोटी नीचे गिरा दी। रोटी सीधे बुढ़िया की थाली में गिरी। बुढ़िया खुश हुई और उसने खा ली। ये कथा कुल मिलाकर कुछ इस तरह की है।

अगर आप इस कथा के ज़रिए कुछ विचार आरम्भ करें, अब साहित्य की कुछ परिस्थितियों पर खुद नज़र डाल सकेंगे तो आपको दिखाई देगा कि साहित्य दरअसल क्या करता है और कैसे करता है। आप इस बात पर विचार करें कि इस बीच में जबकि बुढ़िया तरह-तरह के लोगों के पास जा रही है, अपनी रोटी को वापस लेने के लिए, उस बीच में कौआ रोटी खाता नहीं है। कौआ उस दौरान एक तरह से धैर्यपूर्वक इसके परिणाम की प्रतीक्षा करता है। पर कौए का यह स्वभाव नहीं है। हम देख रहे हैं कि कुछ हुआ नहीं, कौए के पास उसकी चोंच में रोटी सुरक्षित है। यानी कि समय के दो फलक चल रहे हैं एक समय जिसमें हम बुढ़िया के साथ आगे बढ़ रहे हैं, बुढ़िया के अनुभव जगत से, बुढ़िया के जज़्बातों से पेश आ रहे हैं। दूसरी तरफ कौआ, उसका एक और समय है जिसमें वह बैठा हुआ है। यह समय साहित्य ने पैदा किया है। वरना कौओं का स्वभाव होता है कि जो भी उन्होंने छीना है, झपट है वह तुरन्त खा लेते हैं। साहित्य ने यहाँ पर संसार का एक तरह से पुनर्सृजन किया है। ये केवल साहित्य की छवि नहीं है, साहित्य ने संसार की यह छवि बनाई। लोग कहते हैं साहित्य संसार का एक प्रतिबिम्ब या दर्पण है। यह भूल जाते हैं कि साहित्य संसार का नए सिरे से प्रबन्धन करता है तब जाकर पूरी कहानी बन पाती है। वरना यह कहानी बनना सम्भव ही नहीं है।

ये तमाम चैन तब जाग्रत हुई जब इतना बड़ा मंत्री बिल्ली के पीछे दौड़ा, बिल्ली अधिकारी के पीछे दौड़ी, अधिकारी ज़िले स्तर के पटवारी के पीछे दौड़ा, और अन्त में कौए को डर लगा कि पेड़ मेरा घोंसला गिरा देगा। यह मामला सिर्फ अगर इतना ही होता कि जब पेड़ हिलाने का समय आता तब तक कौआ रोटी खाकर उड़ चुका होता तो इस रचना के ज़रिए जिस चीज़ की भी रचना हो रही है यहाँ पर, वो नीति है, या वह अनुभव है, या वो एक विचार है, वह रचना सम्भव ही नहीं थी अगर कौए को इस मंच के एक हिस्से में रोक कर नहीं रखा जाता कि तुम अपनी प्रकृति के विपरीत कुछ देर धैर्य रखो, देखो इस बीच में क्या हो रहा है दुनिया में।

साहित्य के ज़रिए यह सम्भव होता है कि हमारी निगाहें ऊपर बैठे कौए पर नहीं होतीं। इसलिए क्योंकि साहित्य एक तरह का सम्मोहन भी रचता है। ये दरअसल कितनी अस्वभाविक बात है कि हम इसको अपने ध्यान में नहीं ला

पाते हैं कि कौआ न खाए। अगर आप महाकाव्य पर गौर करें तो खलनायक भी किसी मर्यादा से संचालित होता है। नन्द दुलारे वाजपेयी बहुत बड़े समालोचक हुए जिन्होंने कहा कि रावण स्वयं एक मर्यादा से संचालित है तब रामायण सम्भव हो पाती है और उसका जो भी नीति शास्त्र है उभर पाता है। लोक साहित्य में हम लगातार देखते हैं कि साहित्य केवल बने बनाए संस्कारों, नियमों के आधार पर नहीं चलता है। वो नए संस्कारों को गढ़ता है। इसी तरह गढ़ता है कि वो स्थान को, समय को, और ज्ञान को - इन तीनों को अपने ढंग से प्रबन्धित करता है। शेर को क्या पता है और खरगोश को क्या पता है, दोनों का ज्ञान जगत थोड़ा-थोड़ा भिन्न है और अलग-अलग स्तरों पर चल रहा है। तभी यह प्रबन्धन सम्भव होता है कि छोटा-सा कमज़ोर जानवर, दुनिया के सबसे शक्तिशाली जानवर को मारने में समर्थ होता है। यह मामला सिर्फ अति का नहीं है। यह मामला कहानी के द्वारा समय, स्थान और ज्ञान के प्रबन्धन का है।

ये सारे विषय दरअसल शिक्षा के लिए बड़े उपयोगी हैं, लेकिन स्वयं शिक्षा इनको लेकर एक प्रकार से, आप कह सकते हैं कि अन्धी है। या शिक्षा में अभी इस बारीक विमर्श की गुंजाइश नहीं पैदा हुई है कि इसके ज़रिए हम शिक्षकों को, माता-पिताओं को आश्वस्त कर सकें कि बाल साहित्य का या साहित्य मात्र का बच्चे के हरेक पक्ष से सम्बन्ध है। बच्चे की कल्पना से, उसके संज्ञान जगत से, उसके बुद्धि जगत से, उसके निर्णय जगत से - इन सभी से सम्बन्ध है और साहित्य को किसी एक चीज़ में घेर के उसको अनिवार्य कर देना बहुत बड़ी भूल होगी। इसके ज़रिए साहित्य का जो नुकसान हो रहा है वो तो होगा ही, बच्चे का सबसे ज़्यादा नुकसान होगा। यह आपके लिए चिन्ता का विषय होना चाहिए। साहित्य के विमर्श को अगर हम शिक्षा के विमर्श के साथ जोड़ते हुए दोनों को फैला सकें तो मैं समझता हूँ कि वो अवरोध किसी हद तक घटेगा।

इस कहानी में और भी बहुत कुछ आप देखते हैं। आप देखते हैं कि समाज की रचना में हर स्थान, हर जगह का किस तरह का महत्व है। अगर बुढ़िया आज के समय की एक पात्र होती तो कहती कि मैं तो मुख्यमंत्री को जानती हूँ, क्यों बीच वालों के पास जाऊँ। मैं सीधे कुत्ते के पास जाती हूँ। आप समझ सकते हो कि तब यह कहानी ही नहीं होती।

मैं जब एन.सी.ई.आर.टी. में था तो कई बार लोग, मैं चूँकि उनका परिचित हूँ, सीधे मेरे पास आते थे कि साहब मेरे साथ अन्याय हो रहा है। जब मैं कहता कि आपके यहाँ एक सेक्शन ऑफिसर है, एक डिप्टी सेक्रेटरी है, एक हेड ऑफ द डिपार्टमेंट है - उन सबसे आपकी फाइल गुज़री है। तो कहते थे कि आप भी अफसर हो गए, आप भी उसी तरह की बातें करने लगे। ये जो लाल फीता है मैं उसको कटवाने के लिए आपके पास आया हूँ। मुझे इच्छा होती थी कि उनको बैठाकर 'बुढ़िया की रोटी' सुनाऊँ। आप समझिए, देखिए कि मैं कुत्ते के स्थान पर हूँ। अगर आपका काम कुत्ते ने कर दिया तो यह कहानी समाप्त हो जाएगी। और कहानी के ज़रिए यह जो संसार रचा गया है, यह बड़ा रोचक संसार है।

इस संसार को जीवित रखने के लिए पेड़ की भी ज़रूरत है, लकड़हारे की भी ज़रूरत है, चूहे की भी ज़रूरत है और बिल्ली की भी ज़रूरत है। अगर आप चाहते हैं कि उन्हें शिक्षित किया जा सके, तो इनके ज़रिए गुज़रिए। बुढ़िया की तरह अपनी लाठी टेकते हुए उन अनुभवों से गुज़रिए, गुस्सा महसूस कीजिए। देखिए कि गाँव का क्या हाल हुआ है। उस गाँव का लकड़हारा सबसे बुजुर्ग औरत की बात नहीं सुन रहा है। उस गाँव का चूहा छोटा-सा काम करने के लिए, नाटक करने के लिए भी तैयार नहीं है। बुढ़िया जिस पेड़ के सामने रहती है वह पेड़ भी कुछ नहीं सुन रहा है। इसके ज़रिए कुछ सीखिए, बुढ़िया के अनुभव को इतना त्याग्य मत मानिए, इतना बेकार मत मानिए कि अब आपको उस अनुभव से गुज़रने की ज़रूरत ही न हो। संसार का, लोक जीवन का एक रूप जब कोई भी साहित्यिक रचना देता है, बहुत गहराई से देता है। अगर वो एक सच्ची रचना है। उस रचना के बारे में अगर आप उसका मूल रूप देखेंगे जो शंकर ने लिखा है तो आप स्वयं ही देखेंगे कि किताब के रूप में कुछ मानक तय होते हैं जिसकी मदद से हम अच्छा बाल साहित्य क्या है, उसको लेकर एक विमर्श चला सकते हैं।

एक विलक्षण पल

देखिए मैंने आपसे वायदा किया था कि मैं उस दिन की कहानी आपको बताऊँगा जिस दिन यह कहानी मेरे लिए शिक्षा, मनोविज्ञान, बचपन - तमाम चीज़ों के बारे में नए सिरे से सोचने का माध्यम बनी। मैं 'बुढ़िया की रोटी' को

आठ-दस बार सुना चुका था फिर भी यह कहानी उन बच्चों के बीच काफी लोकप्रिय थी। इसके साथ वे कई तरह के अभिनय भी करने लगे थे। जैसे कि बुढ़िया रोटी बेलती है तो वे बेलते थे। अन्त में जब रोटी बिल जाती है तो किस के साथ खाई होगी उसको लेकर चर्चा होती थी कि अचार के साथ खाई होगी, कोई कहता था नहीं उसने सब्जी बनाई होगी या कहीं से ली होगी इत्यादि। इसके बाद बुढ़िया ने क्या किया होगा तो बच्चे कहते थे कि सो गई होगी। थोड़ी देर के लिए वो सो भी जाते थे वहाँ पर। तो कई तरह से वे इस कहानी से जुड़ चुके थे। उनके मानस में बुढ़िया और इन तमाम अन्य चरित्रों की बहुत गहराई से जगह बन चुकी थी। और वे इससे संतुष्ट हो चुके थे, जैसा रसायन शास्त्र में कहते हैं।

उस दिन सुबह चलते समय कुछ ऐसा ही दिमाग मेरा चला कि मैंने अपने साथ रात की बची हुई एक रोटी ले ली। स्कूल में जब कहानी समाप्त होने को हुई यानी कि जब कौए ने घबराकर रोटी गिराई और वह रोटी सीधे बुढ़िया की थाली में गिरी, उस समय मैंने कहा, 'बच्चों वह रोटी मेरे पास है। आप देखेंगे?' तो मैंने थैला खोल के रोटी दिखाई। आप कल्पना नहीं कर सकते कि वहाँ क्या हुआ होगा। अव्वल तो उस क्लास में हमेशा ही चार-पाँच बच्चे कुछ-न-कुछ शोर मचाते ही रहते थे। एकदम सन्नाटा छा गया और उसके बाद हरेक बच्चा उस रोटी को छूने के लिए लालायित हो रहा था। बाद में जब मैं निकलने लगा तो कई बच्चों ने पूछा कि 'सर, आपको यह कहाँ से मिली?' यानी कि वो रोटी इस कहानी के द्वारा छू ली गई थी। हालाँकि, वे आधुनिक युग के बच्चे हैं। टेलीविज़न देखते हैं। केन्द्रीय विद्यालयों में इंटरनेट भी आ चुका है। सब कुछ है लेकिन उनके ऊपर यह सब जादू और दुनिया और सम्मोहन - यह रहस्य खतम हो चुका है। फिर भी वे कुछ क्षणों के लिए यह मानने के लिए तैयार थे कि वो रोटी वही है जो कौए के मुँह से गिरी थी। और किसी-न-किसी प्रकार से मेरे हाथ में पहुँच गई है, और सर हमारे लिए लाए हैं वो रोटी। एक साधारण रोटी थी, इसमें जगह-जगह कुछ इस तरह के छेद बने हुए थे कि लगे हाँ, कौए की चोंच लग गई है। इसलिए एक बच्चे ने पूछा भी कि क्या यहाँ पर उसने चोंच गड़ाई थी। और पूरी क्लास में हर बच्चे के हाथ से वह रोटी गुज़री। उन्होंने उसको छूकर देखा जैसे कि कोई बहुत बड़ी निराली चीज़ जो किसी संग्रहालय से लाई गई हो।

मैं उस दिन बहुत ही विचलित-सा महसूस कर रहा था कि यह जो चीज़ आज हुई है इस कक्षा में, इसकी किस तरह की मीमांसा करें। तो, उस शाम मुझे एहसास हुआ कि दरअसल यहाँ साहित्य ने एक ऐसा काम किया जो साहित्य का सबसे बुनियादी कर्म है। और यह है कि वो भाषा और संसार के बीच जो पुल भाषा ने बनाए थे, उनकी मरम्मत करता है। रोटी शब्द से जो चीज़ व्यंजित होती है उस रोटी शब्द को दोबारा इस कहानी ने कहीं जाग्रत किया, दोबारा उसको सँका। और उस रोटी में, उसको छू सकने में एक विलक्षणता का बोध इस कहानी के ज़रिए पैदा करना सम्भव हो गया। वरना रोटी इतनी साधारण चीज़ है। रोटी को लेकर आज की दुनिया में इस तरह से कोई नहीं सोचता जैसा नज़ीर ने सोचा होगा कि उन्होंने रोटियों पर एक पूरी कविता लिख डाली। रोटी एक साधारण चीज़ है लेकिन उस साधारण चीज़ को इस कृति ने एक असाधारणता थोड़ी देर के लिए दी। और निश्चित रूप से अगर आप तकनीकी सन्दर्भ में भी देखें तो वो सम्मोहन था, अँग्रेज़ी में जिसे हम हिप्नोटिज़्म के नाम से जानते हैं। जो हमारे सामने होता है वो हमें नहीं दिखता, जो नहीं होता वो दिखता है। अगर जादूगर कहता है कि गुलाब का फूल तुम्हें सुंघा रहा हूँ, भले ही वह फूल कागज़ का हो उसमें भी हमें गुलाब की गन्ध आती है। इस कहानी में बहुत सहज ढंग से इसको सम्भव बनाया।

एक तरह का चमत्कृत होने का वह क्षण था जिसमें एकदम समझ में आया कि यह जो तमाम मनोविज्ञान में कहा जाता है कि जब कोई बच्चा किसी चीज़ को नाम देता है कि यह बिल्ली है, कि यह मेज़ है तो वह बिल्ली या मेज़ एक पूरा जगत होती है उसके लिए। और उस शब्द में जगत व्यंजित होता है लेकिन कालान्तर में शब्द घिस जाता है। शब्द रचनाएँ, शब्द विन्यास घिसते-घिसते वहाँ पहुँचते हैं जहाँ हम भयानक-से-भयानक शब्दों का प्रयोग बिना इस बोध के करते हैं कि इससे किसी को चोट पहुँच रही होगी। हिंसा का पूरा रास्ता ही इसी तरह बढ़ा है दुनिया में। जहाँ शब्द पराजित होते हैं वहीं शस्त्र हमसे जीतते हैं और हम देख रहे हैं हमारे चारों तरफ अच्छे-से-अच्छे शब्द भी घिस गए हैं। उनमें अब जीवन नहीं बचा। वे केवल शब्द कोष में रह गए हैं और हम इसका इस्तेमाल अच्छे, बुरे, गंदे ढंग से करते रहते हैं।

इस स्थिति में साहित्य इस बात की आशा या सम्भावना जगाता है कि शब्द को दोबारा जाग्रत करना सम्भव है। जब कोई कवि, कहानीकार, नाटककार अपने ढंग से किसी शब्द को खर्च करता है तो वो शब्द में नई जान डाल देता है। जान ही नहीं डालता बल्कि वो इस शब्द के द्वारा व्यंजित किए जाने वाली चीज़ और उस शब्द के बीच सम्बन्ध को नए सिरे से स्थापित कर देता है। उसकी पुताई भी करता है, उसकी मरम्मत भी करता है। वो हमारे लगातार टूटते हुए जीवन को, लगातार टूटते हुए संसार को, लगातार खण्डहर बनते हुए अनुभव जगत को मरम्मत का सुख देता है। और यह एहसास भी दिलाता है कि यह मरम्मत सम्भव है। तो भाषा का यह बहुत महत्वपूर्ण काम एक तरह से भाषा की संजीवनी शक्ति है, यह जिसको साहित्य के ज़रिए भाषा करवा पाती है। यह साहित्य भाषा का ही एक सेवक है। भाषा संजीवनी तभी तक है जब तक साहित्य का योगदान उसको मिल रहा है।

थोड़ी हवा नाक में घुस गई

साहित्य की अपनी दशा हमारे बीच, हमारे शिक्षा जगत के बीच, हमारे बच्चों के बीच, बड़ों के बीच भी हमारी चिन्ता का विषय है अगर यह बृहत्तर परिप्रेक्ष्य में बने। हम तब बाल साहित्य की एक ऐसी शुरुआत कर पाएँगे जब हमें पश्चिम जैसा बाल साहित्य लिखना है, वाले अन्दाज़ की जगह अपने सन्दर्भ में बाल साहित्य क्या होगा, यह सोचने की दिशा में कदम उठाएँ। क्योंकि अगर हम बाल साहित्य के इतिहास पर गौर करें, तो न तो बहुत बड़े नाम मिलते हैं और थोड़े-बहुत जो बड़े नाम मिलते भी हैं जिन्होंने कुछ रचनाएँ ऐसी दी हैं, उन नामों की आगे जाकर कोई परम्परा नहीं बचती या मिलती।

सर्वेश्वर ने एक बहुत बड़ी रचना 'इब्न बतूता का जूता' आज से करीब 30-35 वर्ष पहले लिखी थी। लेकिन आप गौर करें कि उसके बाद क्या 'इब्न बतूता' जैसी और कोई रचना कोई लिख पाया जिसमें एक-एक जगह का, एक-एक शब्द का इस तरह से स्थान निर्धारित किया गया हो कि उसके ज़रिए जगत भी बनता हो - कि थोड़ी हवा नाक में घुस गई, घुस गई थोड़ी कान में? एक बार सर्वेश्वर जी के साथ ही मैं था जब किसी ने कहा कि थोड़ी हवा नाक में घुस गई, और दूसरी पंक्ति में, थोड़ी घुस गई कान में। यह सुनकर सर्वेश्वर

जी बहुत आहत हुए। उन्होंने कहा कि आप समझ रहे हैं कि यहाँ थोड़ी-थोड़ी है। यानी थोड़ी नाक में घुस गई और थोड़ी कान में। आशय यह था उनका कि यह जो दूसरी पंक्ति है इसमें घुस गई पहले इसीलिए है कि जिससे आपको यह लगे कि यह बची हुई हवा नहीं है जो कि नाक में नहीं घुस पाई थी, इसलिए कान में घुस गई। उसमें भी उतना ही वेग था। कवि इस तरह से सोच सकता है। सर्वेश्वर जी की इस कृति की परम्परा को आगे बढ़ा सकने वाले कवि या कविताएँ नहीं दिखाई देती।

हिन्दी साहित्य में अगर बाल उपन्यासों पर गौर करें तो 1958 में सत्य प्रकाश अग्रवाल नाम के एक उपन्यासकार ने पराग में एक पाठ लिखा - 'एक घर पाँच निघर'। अगर उसे आज भी गौर से पढ़ें तो आप महसूस करेंगे कि यह उपन्यास क्यों एक परम्परा नहीं बन सका। एक मील का पत्थर बन गया। लेकिन उसके बाद हम कोई

कोशिश भी नहीं करते कि हम उस उपन्यास से सीखें कि बच्चों का उपन्यास क्या होता है या उसमें किस तरह की रचनाएँ सम्भव हैं - उस विधा के भीतर जो उसे खोलेंगी, फैलाएँगी। वैसे भी आप जानते हैं कि उपन्यास अभी भी हमारे समाज में एक विधा के रूप में स्थापित नहीं हुआ है। अभी हमारा साहित्य का लेखक कभी इधर, कभी उधर झाँकता है। कभी उस जैसा लिखे, इस जैसा लिखे इस तरह से सोचता रहता है। बाल साहित्य के क्षेत्र में भी यही स्थिति है। बल्कि इससे भी बदतर स्थिति है इसलिए हमें उत्कृष्ट रचनाओं पर विचार करके सोचना होगा कि हम बाल साहित्य के क्षेत्र में एक परम्परा का विकास कैसे कर सकें। इस परम्परा का विकास ज़ाहिर है कि हमारे बीच बाल साहित्य की समालोचना की परम्परा का भी आविर्भाव करेगा। और इस विकास के चलते बाल साहित्य और शिक्षा के बीच के सम्बन्ध के खोए हुए, टूटे हुए अविकसित विमर्श का भी कुछ भला हो जाएगा।

प्रोफेसर कृष्ण कुमार भारत के जाने-माने शिक्षाविद एवं लेखक हैं जो आजकल दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय के सेंट्रल इंस्टिट्यूट ऑफ एजुकेशन में कार्यरत हैं। 2004 से 2010 के बीच वे राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद के निदेशक रहे हैं जहाँ उनके कुशल मार्गदर्शन में बनी राष्ट्रीय पाठ्यचर्या की रूपरेखा-2005 ने शिक्षा के परिदृश्य पर महत्वपूर्ण चिह्न छोड़े हैं। 2010 में उन्हें पद्मश्री से सम्मानित किया गया। इसी वर्ष लन्दन विश्वविद्यालय के इंस्टिट्यूट ऑफ एजुकेशन ने उन्हें मानक डी. लिट. डिग्री से सम्मानित किया।

The Animal School: A Parable

George H. Reavis

Once upon a time the animals decided they must do something heroic to meet the increasing complexity of their “new world”. So they held a meeting and finally decided to organise a school. They adopted an activity curriculum consisting of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum and since these were the basic behaviours of most animals, they decided that all their children would take all the subjects. This produced some interesting issues.

The duck was excellent at swimming, better in fact, than his teacher. But he made only passing grades in flying and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he was made to stay after school to practice. He also had to

drop swimming in order to get more time in which to practice running. This was kept up until his webbed feet were so badly worn that he became only average in swimming. But average was acceptable in school so nobody worried about that, except the duck.

The rabbit started at the top of her class in running, but finally had a nervous breakdown because of so much make-up work in swimming. Moreover, the other animals said she looked like a rat when she jumped in the water for swimming class and all her hair got matted down. Her self-esteem could only take on so much. The squirrel was excellent at climbing until he developed a psychological block in flying class, when the teacher insisted he start from the ground up instead of from the tree tops down. He also developed a ‘charley horse’ from overexertion and then got a C in climbing and D in running.

The eagle was the school’s worst discipline problem; in climbing class, he beat all of the others to the top of the tree but insisted on using his own method of getting there. This was unacceptable, so the eagle was severely disciplined. The prairie dogs, of course, stayed out of school and fought the tax levy because the administration would not add digging and burrowing to the curriculum. They apprenticed their children to the badger and later joined the groundhogs and gophers to start a private school offering alternative education.

And then the fish came home from school and said, “Mom, Dad, I hate school. Swimming is great. Flying is fun if they let me start in the water. But running



The eagle was a problem child and was taken to task

The Animal School: A Parable

and climbing? I don't have any legs; and I can't breathe out of the water." The fish's parents made an appointment for her with the principal who took one look at her progress reports and decreed, "You are so far ahead of the rest of the class in swimming that we're going to let you skip swimming classes and give you private tutoring in running and climbing."

The fish was last seen heading for Canada to request political asylum.

At the end of the year, an abnormal eel that could swim exceedingly well and also run, climb and fly a little had the highest average and was valedictorian.

Does this fable have a moral?

Let the fish swim. Let the rabbits run. Let the eagles fly.

We don't want a school of average eels! Why not invest in children's strengths!

The fable calls for a serious reflection on the notion of learning. It is taken for granted that every child should learn mathematics, science, history, art, music and language. Most children are not interested in all of these subjects. When children are coerced into learning they turn out to be indifferent



The differently-abled protested!

scholars who scrape through school and college and become mediocre dissatisfied individuals. There is a great temptation to fix ourselves or others by investing time to improving the relatively weak areas, true. But that's hardly the way forward.

As educators, we spend our entire career affirming that each student is unique and individual learner. But to what end? There is no one correct way to teach children, but there most definitely is a correct way to teach every child to the best of her/his potential. Until we acknowledge this fact through our actions, not much can be improved.

charley horse: colloquial North American term for painful cramp or spasms in limbs

This story was written back in the 1940s when George Reavis was the Assistant Superintendent of the Cincinnati Public Schools in Ohio, U.S. for the Public School Bulletin. Its illustrated adaptation published by Crystal Spring Books in 1999 is dedicated to those children and adults who have unjustly suffered the fate of standardised tests and inappropriate curriculum and standards.

Design for Change

Every Child Can

Design for Change, is a global movement that cultivates the 'I Can' mindset in every child. It equips children with the tools to be aware of the world around them, believe that they play a role in shaping that world, and take action toward a more desirable, sustainable future. The 'I Can' spirit empowers children *to be the change they wish to see in this world*.

Genesis

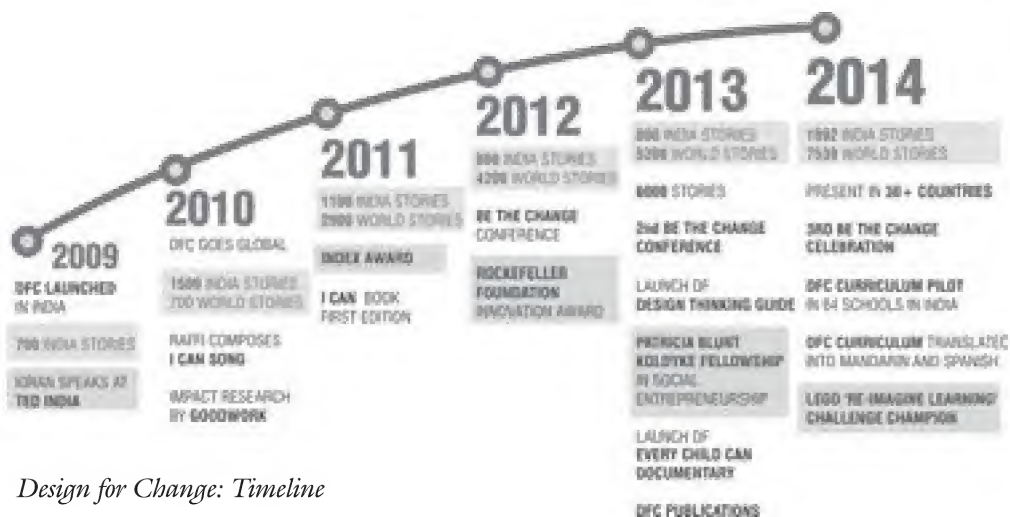
Initiated in 2009 by Kiran Bir Sethi, founder-director of The Riverside School, Ahmedabad, the programme could touch close to 30,000 schools in India than year. In early 2010, Sethi reached out to a global audience through her TED talk 'Kids, take charge'. Subsequently, the entire resource material for *Design for Change* was put online for free download and use, thereby enabling this movement to spread to over 35 countries and reach out to over 300,000 children of 8-15 age group in the past six years. As of today the DFC material is

available in 15 languages making it the hugest undertaking of change taken up by children around the world.

Approach

Based on a simplified 4-step design thinking process acronymed F-I-D-S, the initiative asks students to FEEL any problem that bothers them, IMAGINE a way to make it better, DO an act of change and SHARE their story of change with the world. This approach works towards developing the much required 21st century skills in every child. In over 35 different countries, numerous 'New Generation Superheroes', as the organisers term these children, have stepped up to prove that the power to create change lies in them as much as with the adults who educate and influence their lives.

Design for Change concept is adopted in schools through two formats: *Design for Change Curriculum* and *Design for Change Challenge*. The DFC Curriculum



Design for Change: Timeline

Design for Change

immerses the students and the teacher facilitators into the FIDS process so as to harness life & thinking skills in them by way of a 30-hour course which is transacted through the Design Thinking Guide. This builds a culture, where students and teachers create solutions to socio-economic problems and perpetrate community level transformations. The *DFC I CAN School Challenge* is the world's largest school project. It is an open-to-all nationwide hunt for agents-of-change Superheroes, wherein children are encouraged to apply the FIDS process to create and share their story of change with the DFC coordinators of their country a.k.a. Global Catalysts. Every country has an independent jury that nominates and rewards the Top stories of change for the year! Awards are given in various categories such as 'Most Sustainable Solution', 'Quickest Impact', 'Boldest Idea', and the like.

DFC has institutes like National Institute of Design (NID), Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford (D-School) and KaosPilots, publications like Fielding Nayir International and Design Observer, design firms like CannonDesign, IDEO and Dialogle, and research initiative like the GoodWork Project as part of its continually expanding network of Knowledge Partners.

Celebration

Design for Change hosts the *Be the Change Celebrations/Conference* every year to bring together young agents-of-change Superheroes from around the world on one stage to showcase their remarkable stories of change and to learn from the other change makers and their stories. Thus creating a sense of possibility of the changes that children can bring about in the world. The celebrations are also an opportunity for the



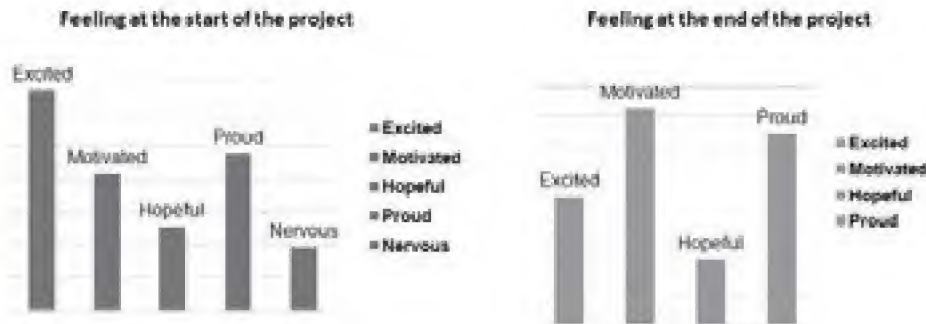
global partners to connect and collaborate so as to spread the contagious "I CAN" bug to all children in different countries.

Documenting the Change

Stories of change have found their way into various publications. *Design Thinking Guide* has been included in the Longman Pearson Value Education textbooks. DFC stories of change have been converted into comic strips and featured in *Tinkle magazine*. Every year, Amar Chitra Katha publishes the top 20 *Design for Change* stories from around the world in the annual edition of the book titled *I Can*.

DFC Research
conducted by

The Good Project
Ideas and Tools for a Good Life



Another collection of short stories based on the real accomplishments of children from India was published under the name *We don't need permission to make the world a better place!* A documentary film titled *Every Child Can* has been produced on *Design For Change* to feature powerful stories of change that demonstrate how children are dreaming up and leading brilliant ideas all over the world.

Recognition

In 2011, *Design for Change* was awarded the INDEX: Design that Improves Life award in the Work category for providing children across the world the opportunity to put their creative ideas into action. In 2012 it bagged the Rockefeller Foundations' Young Innovator Award. In 2014, *Design for Change* was selected among the top 10 Champions of the Re-imagine Learning Challenge by the LEGO Foundation and Ashoka for attempting to change the way the world learns. In 2015, Founder Kiran Bir Sethi was selected among the top 10 finalists for the Global Teacher Prize organized by the Varkey Foundation while *Design for Change* won the first place prize

for Commonwealth Education Good Practice Awards.

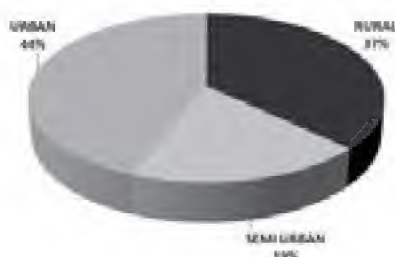
Measuring the Impact

Design for Change has been conducting continuous studies in collaboration with The GoodWork Project, a research initiative under Project Zero at Harvard Graduate School of Education to reaffirm the impact of the FIDS approach on the holistic development of children. The GoodWork Project has been able to utilize its expertise to study the impact of *Design for Change* programme on developing skills and bringing about attitudinal shifts in participants and their community. The research findings do indicate that the *Design for Change* module is conducive for urban as well as rural set up; it is a one arrow missile to combat a milieu of ecological and socio-economic issues; and even through the levels of excitement and hope in students dip during the course of their project, most probably owing to the grim civic redressal realities, they eventually win in motivation and pride for having worked for their cause, which is the true learning objective – to affirm 'I Can'.

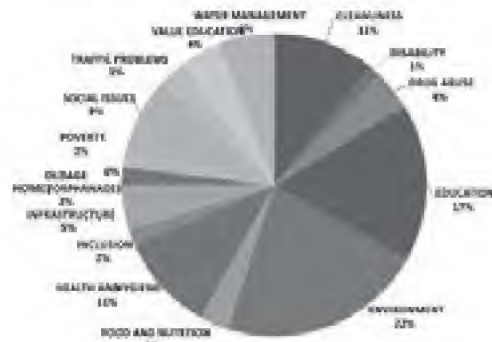
Design for Change

TYPES of school taking part

most inclusive initiative



16 diverse causes being solved



Stories of Change – for real!

BENIN – Fighting Against Forced Marriage

Helene's story has been one of the most moving stories of change that DFC has received. In a village where girls are forced to get married, Helene chose to take a stand for herself and her peers and speak out against this practice. With the guidance of F AWE Benin and mentor Tome Constant, not only did Helene successfully convince her own family and the family to condemn this practice, but she also travelled all the way to Ahmedabad, India to share her incredible story at the Be the Change Celebration 2014 and left the audience with goosebumps.

DENMARK – CrowdBins

Andreas Rübner-Petersen and his teammates tackled the problem of garbage floating in the cities and countryside and found that clearance of litter bins was the real problem. Their idea was to enable individuals and businesses to buy 'crowdbins' and even to empty them. As per their design idea, each bin is given a big QR code – a kind of bar code that you can scan with your smartphone when you find the bin full. On scanning it, you are directed to a website where it can be reported in a very simple way that the bin is full. Those responsible for the bins will receive the message instantly. This project has solved the bin trouble in a way that the government never was able to.

Link for TED talk https://www.ted.com/talks/kiran_bir_sethi_teaches_kids_to_take_charge?language=en

Source: <http://designforchangeindia.com>, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Design_for_Change, <http://icandfc.blogspot.in/>, <http://www.dfeworld.com/>

Of Mice and Children

Arvind Gupta

If you want children to succeed then have faith in their abilities.

Teachers' attitude towards the students is crucial to their progress. By and large, teachers give the opportunity to answer questions or voice opinions in class to just a select group of 'star' or 'pet' students. These 'stars' are invariably those who are "good" at studies. Resultant, the 'stars' shine brighter while the mediocre and weak students curse their own ignorance more and more. Children from backward castes and poor families which are illiterate and do not provide a home environment conducive for studies bear the brunt of this practice. While children from upper class and affluent backgrounds flourish under the indulgent praise of their teachers, the backward children wilt intellectually and get all the more marginalized.

The Human Genome project points out that more than 99% of genes of the entire human species are identical. We wear many caps and carry multiple identities - those of our religion, caste, class, region etc. As teachers our behavior towards our students is influenced by our biases and prejudices. In the late 1960's two amazing books *Pygmalion in the Classroom* and *Letter to a Teacher* both based on real life experiences reflected on the sensibilities of an entire generation.

Letter to a Teacher

Letter to a Teacher was written by a group of Italian peasant children from the school of Barbiana. The school was not an Italian state school, nor was it an elite school for the rich. It was founded by a young radical priest Father Don Lorenzo Milani and was named after a community

of about twenty farmhouses that lay in the region of Tuscany. Originally intended as a night school for working people it soon became evident that the children of the region were being let down by the state schools, they often failed exams and were discouraged by the nature of authoritarian education.

Don Milani gathered together a small group of children and over many long hours they devised a method of schooling that was more relevant to the needs of the poor. The older children actually began teaching the younger children and many 'failures' became successful. Don Milani died in 1967 and the school died with him. But the book that the children wrote became a worldwide best seller. The school boys of Barbiana lucidly examined the class bias of public schools. Using clear (and often angry language) challenging ideas, armed with data and examples the

Dear Miss,

You don't remember me or my name. You have flunked so many of us. On the other hand I have often had thoughts about you, and the other teachers, and about the institution which you call "school" and about the kids that you flunk. You flunk us right out into the fields and factories and there you forget us...

Of Mice and Children

children exposed the variety of overt and covert mechanisms used by schools to discriminate against poor students.

The angry and eloquent tone of the first paragraph set the tone for the remaining text. The children of Barbiana felt that “school is a war against the poor.” The school system often makes the children of the poor feel worthless, lazy or stupid.

Pygmalion in the Classroom

Another brilliant book of the 1960's which shook the world of education like a bombshell was *Pygmalion in the Classroom* by Robert Rosenthal. This stupefying experience shows that there are rarely any dunces in classrooms.

An American professor of psychology, Robert Rosenthal, once had the apparently preposterous idea of calling together twelve of his students, giving each of them five grey mice and giving them a few weeks to teach the mice to find their way through a maze. There was, however, one important detail – he whispered to six of the students that their mice had been especially picked for their particularly well-developed sense of orientation, and told the other six that, for genetic reasons, no great success could be expected from their mice.

In reality, these differences existed only in the minds of the students, since the sixty mice were identical in every respect. When the training period was over, Robert Rosenthal found that the ‘overrated’ mice had performed surprisingly well, while the ‘underestimated’ ones had hardly moved from the starting-point.

Buoyed by this result, Rosenthal wanted to try the same experiment in a training area of a different kind — a school. This was a strange adventure, the results of which have

just been published in the United States, causing great embarrassment to teachers...

Drawing of lots

In May of 1961, Robert Rosenthal and his team arrived at an elementary school in South

San Francisco, a poor area offering low wages, the home of many Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and families on welfare. In short, an area in which it is generally recognized that the performance of children at school suffers as a consequence of the fact that they are ‘disadvantaged’ by the milieu.

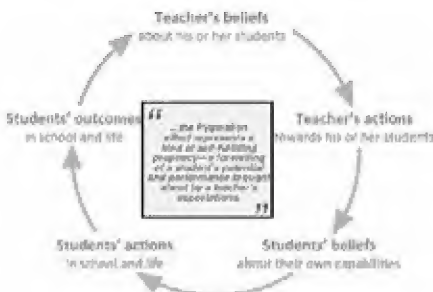
Next, Rosenthal's team lied blatantly to the unsuspecting school management. The intruders said that they were taking part in a ‘vast study’ undertaken by Harvard, financed by the National Science Foundation, on ‘late developers’! Impressed by such grand-sounding credentials, the teachers opened wide the doors of their classrooms.

In order to recognize those students who were capable of improved academic performance in the next school year, the pupils were asked to take school a ‘new kind’ of test set by the school. The poor school teachers were unaware that they themselves and not their pupils were the subject of the investigation. The contribution required of them nevertheless appeared to be eminently ‘neutral’.

In reality, this was all faked. The test — a standard IQ test — was merely a pretext; instead of evaluating this test, the students with ‘potential’ were chosen at random by drawing of lots. Twenty per cent of every class in the school was chosen to be ‘bright’. Moreover, their names were given in a deliberately offhand manner to the teachers: “Anyway, in case you are interested in the results of the tests we carried out for Harvard...” Having thus conditioned

the teachers without their realizing it, the research team merely had to wait and see what transpired. A further test was given four months after the beginning of the new school year, another at the end of the year and the last one a year later.

The results exceeded all expectations, leaving Robert Rosenthal and his ‘accomplices’ gaping. The pupils who had been artificially selected as ‘promising’ gave better results. A Mexican child who had an IQ of 61 before he became a ‘star’ in the eyes of his teachers showed an IQ of 106 one year later. A ‘backward pupil’ the year before, he had become, merely by a drawing of lots, a ‘gifted pupil’. The same amazing change occurred in the case of Maria, another Mexican, whose IQ rose from 88 to 128. Asked to describe the behaviour of these interesting cases, the teachers emphasized their ‘gaiety’, ‘curiosity’, ‘originality’ and ‘adaptability’.



The also-rans

One point, however, should be noted: the progress of these pupils who had turned into ‘stars’ was not uniform throughout the investigation. The most appreciable gains in the first year were made by the youngest children and those in the second year by the older ones. Why this difference? The young ones, strongly influenced by the teacher witnessing their spurt, progressed more slowly when they changed teachers; the

older children, on the other were less easily influenced at the beginning but more likely to sustain their performance by themselves without the support of a teacher.

Another revealing feature of the survey was the fate of the ‘also-rans’ whose names were not ‘whispered’ to the teachers. As we have seen, their results were far less brilliant than those of their classmates. But more serious still is the fact that if one of them did stand out from the rest. He was automatically marked down by the teachers to the level at which he ought to have been. In other words, the more progress he made, the more he was inappropriately ranked. Since it was not expected, his performance was considered undesirable. It merely upset the teacher’s forecasts.

The investigation thus proved that, as in the case of the mice, the educator’s artificial prejudices have a decisive influence on the behaviour of the pupil. In other words, good and bad pupils are creations of the teacher. The members of Professor Rosenthal’s team thought for a time that the pupils whose names had been ‘pinned’ on the teachers had benefited from more intense verbal communication with their teachers, which would have explained their progress. But they had to abandon this hypothesis. A study of the various successive tests showed that these children had progressed, not in verbal intelligence but reasoned intelligence. It was an artificial designation alone that had transformed these potential ‘dunces’ into brilliant students.

In brief, the essential prerequisite for the success of a pupil or of a class is the teacher’s belief in success. This would be the most economical reform of all. But it is also the most difficult political reform to put into effect.

David Horsburgh of Neelbagh

David Horsburgh of Neelbagh

The number of schools in our country is legion. But creative, child-centered learning places are few and far between. One such creative school was the Neelbagh School founded by a British, David Horsburgh (pronounced Hosbro).

THE STORY OF NEELBAGH

Arvind Gupta

David first came to India in 1943, as part of the Royal Air Force. He was based in Chittagong. The serenity of East Bengal inspired him. He saw a little island in the middle of paddy fields with no roads only waterways and an idyllic village school. This was the life he thought he would like to lead, teach in a village school. David went back to England to pick up an advance degree. He returned to India first to work as a professor of English in Mysore, then taught in the Rishi Valley School and did a stint with the British Council. Finally in 1972, he started his own school called Neelbagh.

David was considerably influenced by this one comment by A. S. Neill, the founder of UK's Summerhill School, in which he equated schools to prisons. So David thought of a school where children could go or not go. He also found the curriculum in most schools was very defective. Children had to switch off many of the creative parts for the curriculum because of exam pressures. Thus, he completely abolished exams.

David's ideas of an ideal teacher were also very radical. A teacher is someone who doesn't teach but who sets up suitable learning situations for each child to learn on her/his own. He earnestly believed that children learnt a great deal without being taught. Most teacher training colleges do not have an experimental school. It is like trying to learn swimming by just reading

a manual and without the swimming pool. David had a small in house teacher training school with just half a dozen motivated young interns. They studied theoretical aspects of child development in the morning and then practiced them on children during the afternoon sessions in school.

The small band of teachers who went through David's intense internship programme later on did pioneering work in their own ways. For example Malathi who later started Vikasana was attracted by an advertisement in the Deccan Herald in the 1970's put in by David "Wanted teachers, but not trained". The purpose of the teacher training school was to prepare individuals with the right skills who in turn would start their own small schools in villages.

In all my life I have visited over 2,000 schools. But there has been no school like Neelbagh. I first visited Neelbagh in the early 1980's. And that sacred image still lingers starkly in my mind. The school



Horsburghs in Rayalpad



Neelbagh in 1970s

was located some 30 km from the Rishi Valley School. Beautiful low cost Laurie Baker buildings made from local bricks, red tiles, clay and thatched hay dotted the 7 acre campus in Madanpalle district of Andhra Pradesh. The main academic room was a long hall - one wall of which was composed entirely of shelves. These shelves were full of books – curricular books, enrichment books, story books. There were also hundreds of simple puzzles, teasers, games and teaching aids – mostly made by the children and teachers themselves.

Some fifty children from ages 5 to ages 22 learnt and worked in the same room. There were one or two adults who could be called teachers. They hung around to help children just in case they needed any assistance. There were no lectures, no monologues. Yet each child worked independently. A girl could be doing 5th grade Telugu, and after finishing her book, she would place it on the shelf and pick the 6th grade book. She could also simultaneously be going 3rd grade English and 7th grade Mathematics. The nice thing was children were free to learn at their own pace. They could be learning different grade subjects at the same time. Sometimes a child would need help. But instead of seeking out the adult teacher she would naturally gravitate to a child slightly older to her - someone who had just struggled with the same problem. This youngster would prove to be a better than the adult teacher. The school had wonderful learning spaces strewn all over. Four granite pillars grouted in the ground with a thatched roof made cool alcoves where the children could rest, read and play.

Neelbagh constituted the nucleus for a host of creative methods in teaching and a vast quantum of well-planned learning materials. David was a charismatic leader and a born teacher. With his wife Doreen and his son Nicholas, David developed a diverse curriculum, which included music, carpentry, sewing, masonry, gardening, as well as the usual school subjects, English, mathematics, Sanskrit, and Telugu. He had vertical grouping in the classroom and the children worked on the material on cards, at their specific level. These pedagogic materials were systematically planned, with sketches and drawings and an occasional touch of humour. Fresh materials on cards would be added frequently, to emphasize that the sources for lessons were not finite.

I saw a fourth grade child actually make a wooden cupboard and take it home. Children would participate in making scores of jigsaws and other puzzles which were later sold in Bangalore. With this the children earned a little bit of pocket money. David sincerely believed in the Socrates like dialogues with children. So, each Saturday was devoted to the pursuit of philosophy.

Children came to the school much before the school started. This was because the school was the most wonderful place to be in. Even after the school got over they hung there until sunset. The Neelbagh School was meant for poor village children whom ordinary schools would not admit or would fail. The children paid no fees. The children helped build the school and gained good experience in construction technology. I was amazed to see the level of confidence of these village children. They knew over a 100 songs in ten languages of



Neelbagh Pupil

the world. And they would not let you go unless you sang for them! Most of these poor village children were quite fluent in five languages – Telugu, Kannada, English, Sanskrit and Hindi. Many of the Neelbagh children privately passed SSC and then went to study engineering and medicine.

Neelbagh was not a low-cost school. The buildings ostensibly were simple and harmonized with the surroundings. But the school was full of rich ideas and resources. David had an old car whose components were dismantled and assembled again and again by the students. David along with his son Nicholas wrote over a 100 school books published by the Oxford University Press and Orient Longman. The school expenses largely came from the royalties accrued from these books. It is sad that all these creative books are out of print.

Someday someone will certainly write a more detailed history of Neelbagh. The school broke many stereotypes and proved several points. The then teacher-trainees have continued to take forward Horsbrough's legacy through their unique endeavours – be it M C Malathi through Vikasana, Rohit Dhankar through Digantar, or Amukta Mahapatra through SchoolScape.

VIKASANA

M C Malathi

I always wanted to be a teacher but I did not like the idea of being trained to teach. So I could not believe my luck when I saw an ad that read "Wanted teachers, but not trained." I obviously applied. It so happened that an English couple, Mrs and Mr . Starley desired to start a village school and their friend David Horsbrough had offered to "train" the teachers who were to run this school.

When I turned up for the interview, the Stanleys drove me down into the heartland of settlements on the Karnataka-Andhra Pradesh border, which is where David had his small school Neel Bagh near a village called Rayalpad. Having

come from mainstream and a "schooled", "conditioned", conventional background, I was expecting to see buildings, classrooms and children. There was nothing there, except a mud hut in the middle of open scrub! In this hut, seated on mats, on a neat cowdung floor were about 20 children aged 5-14 and Doreen (David's wife) was teaching craft to them.

David was not in. He had gone to the village to settle a dispute and attend a marriage. When David arrived, I saw that he was a long haired, well built, *lungi* clad, barefoot Englishman. He sang loudly as he entered. I think it was a habit he developed to forewarn the locals of his arrival and

not embarrass anyone with an encounter in an unguarded moment. He was always conscious that people needed to feel at ease as he was not of the community and for this he adapted entirely to local ways of living. Looking back, I think his conscious effort to always take into account the context of the local situation when doing anything was a very endearing quality.

My interview was to ‘write all about myself and what I thought about teaching in as much detail as possible’. He said that he wanted to know how good my English was. I immediately retaliated saying: “You cannot come to India and expect a high standard of English from a student of Kannada literature that too someone opting to teach in a tribal village, cut off from the rest of the world. It will not be fair to reject me on the basis of my lack of competence in English”.

So David gave in gracefully and smiled.

I think the exercise of writing that David put me through was a crucial one in my life. The introspection helped to clarify my reasons for opting to join David and strengthened my choice of career.

David was charismatic, very confident of his ability to get people to do things that he had in mind for them. Just before leaving, I noticed he had marked a part of the area nearby with chalk. He pointed to it and said, “When you come here on Monday, I will have a house ready for you here to stay.” It was a Friday and he expected me to join on Monday!

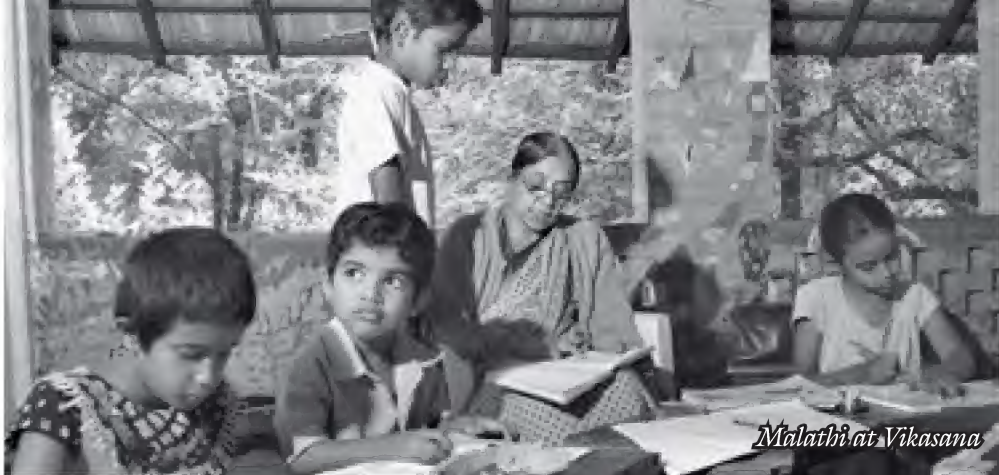
But, come Monday, I and three more teacher trainee candidates did arrive. We saw a beautiful cottage with thatched roof built to house four. The front door was decorated with mango *torana*, the entrance with *rangoli*. Someone had even worked a

design into the cowdung floor. The hut was. Each of us had a corner space to ourselves, a lamp, a desk, and a bamboo cot. Also, there was a small cooking space and a library room within, with a table for each of us. David had built it over the week-end. I realized that this was some man here.

David started training teachers in 1975. I was one of them. The purpose of the training was to prepare individuals with the right skills who in turn would start their own small schools in villages. To train teachers, he needed a school with children: Neelbagh! It was a small, beautiful school – small in terms of the structures and number of children; beautiful because the buildings were of mud and tiles, in harmony with the natural surroundings. David Horsburgh had started it in 1972 very simply. Returning from the village one day, he announced to his wife; “I have started a school, it has two pupils as of now.”

Our in-depth training was for a year. It was very rigorous. David started from scratch, slowly and carefully going through each aspect: curriculum, methodology, learning aids documentation, reflection, assessment, arts, crafts, drama, music, construction. In that one year we not only became competent to start a school but also confident about ourselves. We were called to share tea with him by turns. These were very special times when he would speak on a one to one basis and our respect, awe and bonding with him grew every time. At the end he was not only our mentor and Guru but became our friend and father.

Vikasana is the result of my teacher training experience with David. Vikasana is located outside Bangalore in a rural area. There are thirty four children between the ages of four and eighteen. At Vikasana, there is no comparison or competition; no one-upmanship. But there is the facility



to learn together. Children are the best facilitators. They help us to run the school more than we teach them to learn.

I won't describe here how Vikasana started. We started building our own houses and classrooms, we even made our own bricks. As we helped the children build their homes, so they helped us make our homes. We have turned our challenges into opportunities. For example, we make our own educational materials. We have learned how to do it – to depend on ourselves and to be self-reliant. We look for what we want from elsewhere, and come back here and create it ourselves.

We don't label children as having 'learning difficulties', because we make materials to aid each child. When a child 'can't learn' we don't give up; we think about how to help this child to learn. In all these situations, the children and adults both learn while doing things together. We never feel there is something we cannot do. We don't need to talk about co-operation and helping, since it comes naturally. The words don't arise. It's not that life is always peaceful; it is the way it is.

Since most of these children are first generation learners, there is no help from parents who are passive. The positive aspect is that they leave the child completely to me; I am like a single parent. So there is no need to compromise, and I can correct any faults immediately by myself. However, it is a great responsibility, since the child would otherwise be working and supporting the family. This is the fee the parent pays.

What do the children get out of their Vikasana education? Beauty, love of nature and a sense of equality in school. David used to say, "Teach what is difficult". So I have the opportunity to be a continuing learner in Vikasana. I must challenge myself in my teaching, by taking on subjects I need to work hard at.

Since the children can see that I manage the place alone, they take up many responsibilities. This is a form of freedom for them. We don't need to talk about responsibility; it comes with the freedom. Everything that happens at Vikasana is a result of partnership. Vikasana is 70% from the students and 30% from me.

We don't need to make vertical groups formally. Since the younger and older children share the same space, the younger ones know what to expect as they grow older. Everything is visible to them; they see what they have to do and can do it, and so they move forward. My job lessens, since in areas where I am limited, the opportunity for the children increases. If there is a yardstick for success, it is that Vikasana is the children's space. They have had freedom and space, and they are independent and capable of sharing. Not one child comes back to their parents or to the system after graduating from the 10th std. – they go out there and find their living.

You may ask, can I also do this? Can everyone create a place like Vikasana? People would say to David

Horsburgh, what you are saying is only theory, not practice. So David started Neelbagh to show that “I am doing it; everybody can do it.” Then people would say, you can do it because you are a foreigner, or you are interested, but others cannot do it. So he trained ordinary people like

us to be teachers. He taught that teachers have a responsibility to give generously. In fact everybody, be he a software engineer or a plumber, can teach ten children from around his neighbourhood. You need not be a teacher. You can do this even for selfish reasons – for your own growth and learning.

[Compiled from the interview given to Talim Net – a group that delves into alternative education in March 2004 at Goa and the talk delivered at the Centre for Learning Conference at Bangalore in December 2006]

WHERE THE MIND IS WITHOUT FEAR

Amukta Mahapatra

Many indigenous communities, individuals and organisations have done path-breaking work in education. One such effort is Neel Bagh, where I spent about 1½ years being a teacher-trainee. It was a place where being a human being mattered, being a member of a community mattered and being an individual was also important. This was the basis for the rest that followed. A child may have learnt five languages — that was wonderful, but it was not the most important aspect of life. Another child may have designed an ingenious machine — it was celebrated, but again this was not the ultimate goal. The fundamental issue was whether you were evolving into a decent human being and whether the learning process was helping this evolution. Learning was crucial but development was the aim — the development of the individual, the group and the larger society.

At times, parents or others from the nearby villages would want to learn English or sit an examination. The morning English class time was then used, twice a week or so, to help them. And who would teach

them? The children of course! Each of them was assigned an adult. They would teach sitting outside, scattered all around near the main schoolroom. Some others who were not teaching would continue with their English class. So, the age range expanded sometimes to cover three year olds to 40 year olds. As teachers, we moved around to help only when required.

Can such practices be replicated? The teacher and others working in schools need help to think through ideas, look at unexamined feelings and have classroom skills at their fingertips, so that they can arrive at a practice that is essential for children. In Neel Bagh, each incoming teacher trainee was trained to be a special kind of a teacher. All of us cannot be David Horsburgh, but we can each be our own Davids and battle against the Goliaths of the system to ensure a better learning world for our children. And one of the Goliaths is the assumption that all children can learn the same thing, at the same time and in the same manner. Each child learns differently and there is an urgency to recognise this principle in our schools today.

[Excerpts from an article that appeared in the Hindu on January 11, 2004]

IN DAVID HORSBROUGH'S WORDS...

David Horsbrough gave innumerable candid and relevant answers in an interview to Rosalind Wilson, editor of the children's magazine *Target* in 1983.

On the role of teachers: Well. I'm getting round to a completely different idea of the teacher: it's someone who doesn't teach, but who sets up suitable learning situations for each individual child, who learns by himself. The thing is to get children to learn—and not to teach them.

On the value of education: One of the things about education is that you never realize how useful it is until you're educated. Somebody who's not educated cannot see the actual value of education.

On the curriculum: A rural curriculum doesn't appeal to me at all. I think this is all nonsense, brought about by the urban 5 per cent elite who run the country, and who run the educational system and, in fact, ensure that most of the rural population drop out of the educational system.

On teachers' training: The idea of having a training school without a school is just ridiculous! It is like teaching a child pottery without a potter's wheel. But every training school in the country has no school! It is incredible that you can have a teachers' training unit without a school. You need children, if you are going to train teachers.

In answer to the question, "**How did you decide what the curriculum should be?**", he answered: Oh, purely arbitrary:

all curriculums are arbitrary. For example, we teach philosophy in our school, because I think philosophy is an extremely useful thing for children to learn. But you won't find it, I daresay, in the curriculum of any other school in India because other people don't think philosophy is important.

We also teach Aesthetics, or we teach Music Appreciation, we teach Discussion techniques. Now these all seem to me vitally important things for children, but

you won't find them in the average curriculum. Similarly, we teach pottery. Sometimes people come and see, our pottery department and say, "Ah, very good! You are teaching the children pottery so they can earn their living as potters." I'm doing nothing of the kind, of course: I think education through things is essential. You have heard of

Eric Gill, the sculptor, who wrote a lot on Education. One of the things he said was, that we never educate children in the use of things—always ideas, and exercises and games, and so forth, but never things. I think it is important that children should learn how materials exert their own discipline on the user—which is a discipline of the material, as opposed to the discipline of the adult. You know, if I make a mistake in English, you are the one that corrects it. If I make a mistake on the wheel, you know, the clay says to me, "You're not treating me the right way." If I plane a piece of wood against the grain, it becomes rough. The wood is exerting its own discipline on the child, you see, which is a marvelous thing. It's not an external discipline, as it were: it's ingrained in the material.



Photo credit: Vijay Padki, Neelbagh Trustee

Lifelong Kindergarten

Dr. Mitchell Resnick

We live in a world that is changing more rapidly than ever before. Today's children will face a continual stream of new issues and challenges in the future. Things that they learn today will be obsolete tomorrow. To thrive, they must learn to design innovative solutions to unexpected problems. Their success and satisfaction will be based on their ability to think and act creatively. Knowledge alone is not enough: they must learn how to use their knowledge creatively.

Unfortunately, most schools are out of step with the needs of today's rapidly changing society. They were not designed to help students develop as creative thinkers. But there is an important exception: kindergarten. As I see it, the traditional kindergarten approach to learning is ideally suited to the needs of the 21st century.

What do I mean by the kindergarten approach to learning?

Imagine a kindergarten classroom. In one corner of the room, a group of children is building a series of towers with wooden blocks. In another corner, a group is creating a large mural with finger paint. In the process, children are exploring important ideas: What makes a tower stand up or fall down? How do colours mix together?

Even more important, the kindergarten students are starting to develop as creative thinkers. As they playfully work together, they learn about the creative process: how to imagine new ideas, try them out, test the boundaries, experiment with alternatives, get feedback from others, and generate new ideas based on their experiences.

At the core of this creative process is the ability to create. If we want children to develop as creative thinkers, we need to provide them with more opportunities to create.

Friedrich Froebel understood this idea when he opened the world's first kindergarten in 1837. Froebel filled his kindergarten with physical objects (such as blocks, beads, and tiles) that children could use for designing, creating, and making. These objects became known as Froebel's Gifts. Froebel carefully designed his Gifts so that children, as they played and constructed with the Gifts, would learn about common patterns and forms in nature.

Froebel was making for makers – he made objects that enabled children in his kindergarten to do their own making and creating. Froebel's work can be viewed as an early example of Seymour Papert's constructionist approach to education. Papert argued that the activity of making things provides a rich context for learning. It doesn't really matter what you are making; you might be building a sand castle, writing a poem, cooking a new recipe, or programming an interactive robot. What's important is that you are making something that is meaningful to yourself or others around you.

Why is the activity of making so important to the process of learning? When you make something in the world, it becomes an external representation of ideas in your head. It enables you to play with your ideas and to gain a better understanding of the possibilities and limitations of your ideas. Why didn't it work the way I expected? I wonder what

Lifelong Kindergarten

would happen if I changed this piece of it? By giving an external form and shape to your ideas, you also provide opportunities for other people to play with your ideas and give suggestions on your ideas. Why didn't I think of that? How can I make it more useful for more people?

There is a constant interplay between making new things in the world and making new ideas in your head. As you make new things, and get feedback from others (and from yourself), you can revise, modify, and improve your ideas. And based on these new ideas, you are inspired to make new things. The process goes on and on, with making and learning reinforcing one another in a never ending spiral.

This spiral is at the heart of the kindergarten approach to learning – and the creative process. As children create towers with blocks and pictures with finger paint, they get ideas for new towers and new pictures. And, over time, they develop intuitions about the creative process itself.

If this learning approach has been so successful in kindergarten, why hasn't it been applied in other parts of the educational system? One reason is a lack of appreciation for the importance of helping young people to develop them into creative thinkers. But there is another reason: the lack of appropriate media and technologies. Wooden blocks and finger paint are great for students working on kindergarten projects and learning kindergarten concepts (like number, shape, size, and color). But as students get older, they want and need to work on more advanced projects and learn more advanced concepts. Wooden blocks and finger paint won't suffice. So, after kindergarten, most schools shift to an "information delivery" approach to education, using lectures, books, and

other resources to deliver information to students.

How can we help students, as they move through elementary school and beyond, continue to learn in a kindergarten approach, so that they continue to develop as creative thinkers? This is where, in my opinion, digital technologies can play a transformational role in learning and education. Of course, digital technologies do not, on their own, support a kindergarten approach to learning. Indeed, most schools use digital technologies simply to extend and reinforce the information delivery approach, using computers to deliver information just as they use lectures and books. But if digital technologies are properly designed and supported, they can extend the kindergarten approach, so that learners of all ages can continue to learn in the kindergarten style.

The LEGO Mindstorms robotics kits are a good example. As students create and program robots with Mindstorms, they are working in a kindergarten style: playfully making things in collaboration with one another. But they are learning ideas and concepts (such as sensing, feedback, and control) that are far beyond the kindergarten curriculum. I see Mindstorms as a Froebel Gift for the 21st century. Just as Froebel's blocks, beads, and tiles engaged kindergarten children in creative explorations, Mindstorms uses new materials (computer programs and electronic circuits) to engage older children in creative explorations.

I hope that, over time, more and more technologies are developed to extend the creative approach of kindergarten to learners of all ages. But it won't be easy. There are strong cultural forces that are pushing in different directions. Many kindergartens are starting to change their approach.

Kindergarten students are spending more time filling out phonics worksheets and memorizing math flashcards, rather than playing with blocks and finger paint. In short, kindergarten is becoming more like the rest of school.

If we want to help children develop as creative thinkers, so that they are prepared for tomorrow's society, we need

to do exactly the opposite. Instead of making kindergarten more like the rest of school, we need to make the rest of school – indeed, the rest of life – more like kindergarten.

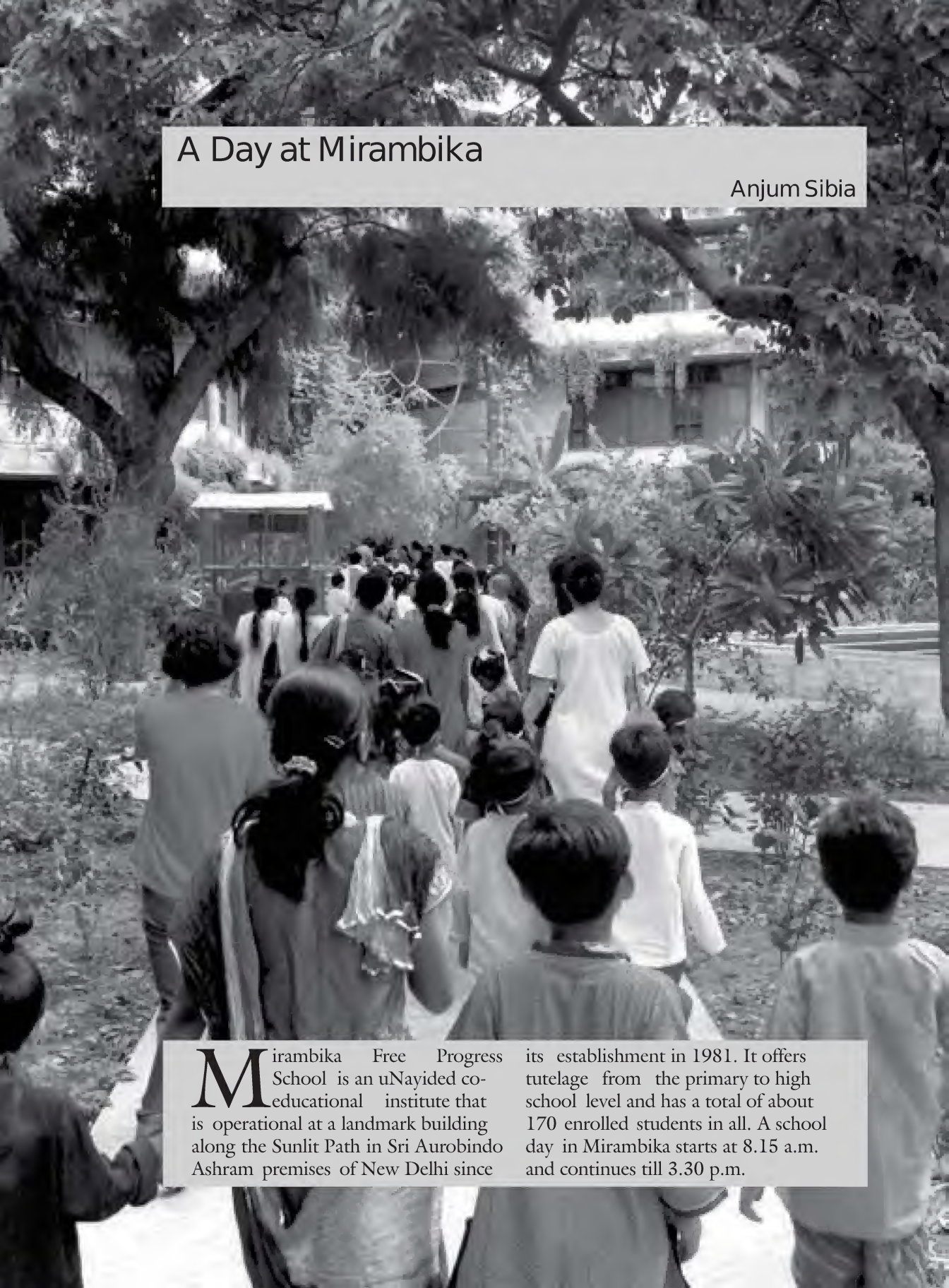
This paper was presented by Dr. Resnick at the annual symposium of the Forum for the Future of Higher Education, Aspen, Colorado, September 2001.

For more Freobel Gifts, visit <https://llk.media.mit.edu/mission/>

*Dr. Resnick is LEGO Papert Professor of Learning Research and Head of the Lifelong Kindergarten group at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Media Lab, Cambridge, MA, USA
for more ...*

A Day at Mirambika

Anjum Sibia



Mirambika Free Progress School is an unaided co-educational institute that is operational at a landmark building along the Sunlit Path in Sri Aurobindo Ashram premises of New Delhi since

its establishment in 1981. It offers tutelage from the primary to high school level and has a total of about 170 enrolled students in all. A school day in Mirambika starts at 8.15 a.m. and continues till 3.30 p.m.

It is Monday morning 8.30 a.m. The children, without school uniform, dressed in everyday wear, are seen approaching the school building through the Sunlit Path. Some enter; others start informal games in the grounds. No bell rings. Children move towards the dining hall for breakfast in company of their 'Diyas' (as the teachers are called in Mirambika). They have informal exchanges over a bite of sandwich and fruit. The term 'Diyas' is coined from the words 'didi' (elder sister) and 'bhaiya' (elder brother). As explained by a teacher: it symbolises beckoning the light, the one who kindles the light in children'.

Mornings begin with an hour of sports in which both students and Diyas enjoy themselves in the field. After work out they are ready for studies and quietly disappear into their 'groups' (classrooms). Children and their Diyas are responsible for dusting, sweeping, mopping tidying and beautifying their work spaces—which they get on to next. The work culture of the school is evident in the joint cleaning efforts, regardless of one's position as teacher or student.

Music for 'meditation' marks the start of the intellectual segment of the school day and a hushed silence prevails. Students and Diyas are seen sitting, some standing with eyes closed, a few looking out of the large windows deep in thought. Children are told to think of what they left at home and what they will do in school. One purpose of this exercise is to help children make a smooth transition from home to school and help them set a pace for the day's work.

Children of all age groups devote their mornings to 'project work', wherein they work on specific topics of their choice in small teams or even alone. Efforts are made to integrate different subject areas to achieve the project goals. Project time

is eagerly looked forward to by one and all. This involves a lot of experimenting, searching, calculating, developing, inventing, exploring, creating, reading, writing, singing, dancing and so on. This can also involve field trips. The project work is evaluated either through self-evaluation sheets prepared by the Diyas or by discussing it in the group.

Come noon and ends the project time for the day. Children along with the Diyas have lunch together, sitting on durries spread on the floor of the dining hall. They are served vegetarian food prepared in the Ashram kitchen. Each group has serving duties by turn, followed by each person cleaning his/her own 'thali' and placing it in specified cupboard/stack. It is 1.00 p.m. and those in Red and Blue groups (pre-primary levels) go home after lunch.

Post lunch 'formal training' ensues and lasts from 1.00 to 3.00 p.m. for the older groups i.e. Yellow group onwards. During this segment thrice a week, Mathematics and languages (English and Hindi) are taken up by subject specialists, majority of whom are volunteers (part-time teachers). Also, twice a week in the afternoons children have 'club' activities in areas like cooking, management, jewellery making, calligraphy, art, craft, pottery making. The children are free to choose and participate in an activity of their interest. The day schedule is not rigid and is subject to change depending on the nature of activity being undertaken by the children.

The closure of the day's work at 3.00 p.m. is 'home session' marked by playing of meditation music. Home sessions are meant for generating togetherness, openness and trust, for an active awareness of what it means to be part of the whole. At the end of the day we concentrate and in silence we go within integrating our experiences for the day.



Communal Dining Hall at Mirambika

Before going home they have a glass of milk/juice with snacks under the trees, chatting and laughing together. At 3.30 p.m. all those from Green group onwards continue the chatter as they proceed to leave Mirambika for the day. In this way they get ready for the transition to their homes.

Ethos behind Mirambika

Mirambika seeks innovations/alternatives in curriculum with respect to both content and curriculum delivery by pacing teaching according to the personal growth needs and capacities of the learner. It is based upon the Three Principles of True Teaching, as promulgated by Sri Aurobindo and his spiritual collaborator, the Mother – first, nothing can be taught...The teacher is not an instructor or task-master; he is a helper and a guide...to show the pupil how to acquire knowledge for himself; second, the mind has to be consulted in its own growth, i.e. learning should be self-directed; and third, (education is) to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be.

Curriculum: what's the knowledge impartment plan?

Mirambika has a multi-level learning system, i.e. children within a group may perform

at different levels in different subjects. The focus here is on the naturally evolving rhythm of learning. The curriculum and consequently the syllabus is not pre-set or rigidly structured and is open-ended and evolves 'organically' in accordance with the needs and capacities of the child. However for each group, goals in terms of qualities, mental faculties and skills to be developed during the course of one year are decided and delineated into quarterly targets. Within this broad framework the child is provided varied learning experiences by working on projects which are interdisciplinary in nature.

Diyas: instruments for spreading the light of knowledge

"We do not need teachers with opinion and the degree to teach the children, we need living being who can impart a sense of value, who can help to evoke in children what is best in them, who can help them discover their own inner light and nurture the instruments to express its truth" – the Mother.

The teachers in Mirambika are called 'diyas'. The faculty members fall under three categories: fulltime teachers i.e. those residing in the Ashram, trainee teachers

i.e. those doing B.Ed, practice teaching and volunteers who are part-time teachers. Teachers are not salaried staff but are paid a token stipend which varies for full time and trainee teachers. The volunteers are mainly subject specialists who take up some specific activity who work for free and are only paid conveyance allowance. The teachers are chosen on the basis of their interest in working with children, affection and motivation to do their job—and come from both urban and rural backgrounds. The number of teachers keeps changing from time to time because of the volunteer's leaving and joining the school, however the student-teacher ratio is approximately 3:1. Mirambika has a Teacher Training Wing on its premises which conducts perennial training for its teachers-in-service as well as pre-service. The training programme focuses on the school ideology and philosophy, principles of learning which form the basis of teaching-learning in school.

The Class Level Ladder: Red-Blue-Green instead of 1-2-3!

There are no graded classrooms in Mirambika. Children are grouped according to their age and each group has a name given to it. For the younger children the groups have names of colours which are chosen by the teachers namely - the youngest group is called the Red group and has children from 3 to 4 years of age. The next group is the Blue group having children of 4-5 years of age followed by the Green group (5+ years), Yellow (6+ years), Orange (7+ years), Progress (8+ years). The two senior most groups are Humility (9+ years) and Receptivity (10+ years). There is an overlap of ages in all the groups. In the older groups names of the groups change and the teachers and the students decide the name of their group

at the beginning of the year. These group names suggest the focus of the group, the stage through which the children are going through, and the mental faculty/qualities the school wants to develop.

Classroom setting: Changes every day!

Red-Blue-Green groups have large areas of work, low tables and durries for sitting. The round sunken area in the corner of the room is used for Circle Time. The classrooms also have an annexe which is used by children for sleeping in! or for 'privately' consulting the *Diyas*. The areas of work for older groups have tables and chairs arranged in a circular manner to facilitate interaction among peers. Low walls separate the areas of work for different groups. Classes can move to "Neem Grove", "Duck and fish Pond", "Fountain Foyer", etc., as per the inclination of the pupils and the *Diyas*.

Course Books: Different for all!

To each, one's own is the adage. Normally, books are used only from the age of six onward. A book that is loved by one child may be less interesting to another. The facilitators suggest books and additional resource material individually and in consultation with the child/parents. At the beginning of the year, a lump-sum is paid for books and stationery. At no point are standard text books used. Children also use the library and their classmates' books for their resource material.

Uniform: Nada!

Clothes express some aspect of the personality, hence no uniformity, no school uniform. Only, the clothes should not obstruct free movements of the children, especially for sports and

A Day at Mirambika

adventure! However, the school is very particular about shoes – only canvas shoes (the without laces variety for younger ones and laced ones for all others) so that they can run freely and participate in athletics

Evaluations: Zero-exam zone!

No tests or exams are conducted at any stage in any group (class) in Mirambika. The *Diya*, often in consultation with the students, decides the goals to be achieved during a specific time. Accordingly, the class activities are planned by the *Diyas* in advance—normally for one week. Reflection is done to know how much the child has covered and what more is needed. The teacher makes the child's profile covering all areas of learning (mental, physical, vital and psychic). No marks or grades are given; the progress is measured against the child's own record and not with others in the group. It is viewed as feedback of child's work by the teacher to parents, is descriptive, non-judgmental and discussed individually with each parent. This is followed up by concrete action plan for the child by parents and *Diyas*. In higher groups children undergo self-evaluation, peer evaluation on completion of a topic or activity for which pre-formas and schedules are prepared by the *Diyas*.

Diyas divulge!

Children usually take interest in their work especially projects, but show distaste towards written work. The *Diyas* invent a variety of motivating techniques like, preparing observation sheets, asking them to write their observations and giving them 'badges' for the designation of 'Mirambika Researchers', charting formal presentations of their work. "It is important to know what the child knows and start from that

point, build up on the strength of the child. No point saying to the child, 'You don't even know this!'" Another *Diya* expressed, "I don't like to think in terms of shaping children in a pre-existing mould. I am trying to help the child develop into a complete human being."

Informal communication lines exist between the teachers and children. 'Power' or 'control' does not rest with the teacher and negotiations help to maximise student's effort. Attempts are made to provide opportunities to children to increase their sense of obligation, self-reflection that helps in maintaining a good working relationship. *Diyas* are often heard using the phrase, "I am also learning, no one knows everything", in order to make children initiate some action to seek information or facts on their own. This is clearly in accordance to official version of Mirambika as a learning centre for all children as well as teachers. No sharp boundaries between the one who 'knows' and 'knows not' are maintained.

In words of the alumni

Mirambika, the former students remark, is a way of life, a source of values and morals which has remained with them even in a world "contrary" to Mirambika. They became more conscious about this aspect when they shifted to other schools, whereas expressed by one, 'they stood out as individuals more for their values than for academic achievements'. They further elaborated, 'Mirambika shaped their personality while they were students', as they felt they still stand out from the crowd by being able to contribute meaningfully to whatever they do. This they said is only because of their initial experiences at Mirambika. It is quite apparent; Mirambika seems to have had a pervasive effect on the life of its students.



High Learning!

An ex-teacher's testimony

It is difficult to describe an integrated approach in abstract terms. So, I will try to capture its essence through an example. Fifteen years back I taught for a couple of years in an experimental school, Mirambika – the school was situated in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, New Delhi. At that time the school subscribed to no curriculum. The class teacher along with the children decided on the curriculum. The children chose a “topic” of their interest and worked on it. The role of the teacher was to help the children. Having decided on the topic of “birds” the first thing the children did was to make a bee line for the library. Here they pulled out all the books on birds and brought them into their classroom. These would be their text books for the next two weeks. Now everything centred on “birds”. The first thing the children did early morning was to go bird watching in the lovely Ashram Campus. They made a checklist of birds. With the help of the teacher they tried to record some bird calls. What were the local Hindi names of these birds? They folded paper birds, wrote their daily “bird” diary, composed poems on birds and drew them in all their glory. They collected bird feathers; fallen and abandoned nests. They made lists of resident and migratory birds. Where do these small yellow and white wagtails come from? The children actually looked at their migratory routes on the globe. For two weeks school life for these children was centred on the study of birds. It involved writing, drawing, making models, composing poems, counting, imitating bird calls and many other skills. At the request of the teacher two parents piled up all the children in their vans and took them for a day long bird watching spree to the Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary located on the outskirts of Delhi. Children learn best not in the confines of a classroom but in places brimming with human activity— happening places!

Arvind Gupta, scientist, educator, toymaker, ‘copyleft’ lobbyist

[Excerpts from the treatise 'Life at Mirambika: A Free Progress School' published by the Publication Division, NCERT]



With the children of Nasz Dom (Our Home) Orphanage in 1920

King of Children: Dr. Janusz Korczak

Arvind Gupta

According to an ancient Jewish myth there must live on earth at any one time a few righteous people.

Only the existence of these righteous ones justifies humanity's continuation in the eyes of the Lord; otherwise, God would turn his face from earth and we all would perish.

As long as they live these righteous people must remain unknown to all other men. Only after their death may we discover their identity. Then some do become known, and posterity can recognize their extraordinary virtue and come to admire them, their lives, and their deeds.

One such person was Dr. Janusz Korczak, a Polish-Jewish children's writer and educator. He was born Henryk Goldszmit but he would be known by his pseudonym Janusz Korczak. He is as well known in Europe as Anne Frank. Like her, he died in the Holocaust and left behind a diary; unlike her, he had a chance to escape that fate—a chance he chose not to take.

Korczak was a trained medical doctor who specialized in children's diseases. He founded the first national children's newspaper, trained teachers and worked in juvenile courts defending children's rights.

He set up an orphanage to take care of destitute children.

Korczak loved children deeply; he devoted all the moments of his life to them. He studied them and understood them more thoroughly than most. Since he knew children, he did not idealize them. As there are good and bad adults, all kinds and sorts, so too Korczak knew there are all kinds of children. Korczak saw children for what they were, and was at all times deeply convinced of their integrity. He suffered from the fact that often children were treated badly, not given the credit they deserved for their intelligence and basic honesty.

His books *How to Love a Child* and *The Child's Right to Respect* gave parents and teachers new insights into child psychology. His latter book became the basis for the first draft of the United Nations Charter on Rights of Children. Generations of young people had grown up on his books, especially the classic *King Matt the First*, which tells of the adventures and tribulations of a boy king who aspires to bring reforms to his subjects. He set up orphanages in the dark slums of Warsaw and lived among children in real life, not just in the imagination, for he saw them as

the salvation of the world. The children in the orphanage often performed the famous play *The Post Office* written by Rabindranath Tagore. He founded the first national children's newspaper, trained teachers in what we now call moral education, and worked in juvenile courts defending children's rights.

Korczak felt that within each child there burned a moral spark that could vanquish the darkness at the core of human nature. To prevent that spark from being extinguished, one had to love and nurture the young, make it possible for them to believe in truth and justice. The titles of his books are suggestive of his innate sensitivity – *Confessions of a Butterfly*.

Because Korczak was determined to live both as a Pole and a Jew in prewar Poland, he was not above criticism. Jews saw him as a renegade who wrote in Polish rather than Yiddish or Hebrew. The right-wing Poles never forgot that he was a Jew. The radical socialists and the communists of the interwar period saw him as a conservative because he was not politically active, and the conservatives saw him as a radical because of his socialist sympathies.

On August 6, 1942 the Nazis ordered the two hundred children of the orphanage to be taken to the train station, to be packed into railroad carriages. Korczak knew that the carriages were to take the children to their death in the gas chambers of Treblinka. Korczak meant everything to the children. He was their father, mother, friend, philosopher and guide. Despite many persuasions Korczak steadfastly remained with the children until their end.

To assuage the children's anxiety, Korczak told them that they were all going for an outing in the country. On the appointed day he had the oldest child

lead them, holding high the flag of hope, a gold four-leaf clover on a field of green — the emblem of the orphanage. As always, even in this terrible situation, Korczak had arranged things so that a child rather than an adult would be the leader of other children. He walked immediately behind this leader, holding the hands of the two smallest children. Behind them marched all the other children, four by four, in excellent order, sure of themselves, as they had been helped to be during their stay at the orphanage.

Korczak sacrificed himself to keep his trust with the children, when he could have easily saved himself. With his many friends in high places it was very easy for him to escape. But as the head and leading light for thirty years of the Jewish orphanage in Warsaw, Korczak was determined not to desert any of the children who had put their trust in him. As he said to those who beseeched him to save himself: "One does not leave a sick child in the night," and "One does not leave children in a time like this."

The children remained calm throughout, as if in silent protest, or contempt of the murderers. One of the German guards told Korczak to leave. But Korczak refused, as before, to separate himself from the children, and went with them to the gas chamber in Treblinka.

Korczak realized early that children were the butt of the entire adult world and he coined the revolutionary slogan: "Children are the oldest proletariat of the world".

One reason why he is virtually unknown in India is that he wrote in Polish. Several of his books have now been translated into English but they are still inaccessible. Korczak's saintly life has also inspired a few films. As he was



Janusz Korczak and the children, memorial at Yad Vashem, Israel

killed in 1942 by the Nazis all his works are in the public domain. But they are very difficult to get. Hopefully, someday a comprehensive website on Janusz Korczak will make all his works available.

This will enable his works to be translated in many languages. However a wonderful biography of Janusz Korczak titled *King of Children* by Betty Jean Liffon was recently uploaded on the web.

Download links of aforementioned books:

How to Love a Child

www.januszkorczak.ca/legacy/3_How%20to%20Love%20a%20Child.pdf

www.arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/loveeverychild.pdf

The Child's Right to Respect

http://www.januszkorczak.ca/legacy/4_The%20Child%27s%20Right%20to%20Respect.pdf

King Matt the First

<http://ir.nmu.org.ua/bitstream/handle/123456789/126560/0d7d6d12c48db752194903ab9c1491f6.pdf?sequence=1>

King of Children by Betty Jean Liffon

<http://www.arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/Janusz.pdf>

Teach your children well

Abraham Lincoln

He will have to learn, I know, that all men are not just, all men are not true.
But teach him also that for every scoundrel there is a hero; that for every selfish
Politician, there is a dedicated leader...

Teach him for every enemy there is a friend.

It will take time, I know, but teach him, if you can, that a dollar earned is of far more value
than five found...

Teach him to learn to lose...and also to enjoy winning.

Steer him away from envy, if you can, teach him the secret of quiet laughter.

Let him learn early that the bullies are the easiest to lick...

Teach him if you can, the wonder of books...

But also give him quiet time to ponder the eternal mystery of birds in the sky, bees in the
sun and flowers on a green hillside.

In the school teach him, it is far honourable to fail than to cheat...

Teach him to have faith in his own ideas, even if everyone tells him they are wrong...

Teach him to be gentle with gentle people, and tough with the tough.

Try to give my son the strength not to follow the crowd when everyone is getting on the
bandwagon...

Teach him to listen to all men...but teach him also to filter all he hears on a screen of truth,
and take only the good that comes through.

Teach him if you can, how to laugh when he is sad...

Teach him there is no shame in tears,

Teach him to scoff at cynics and to beware of too much sweetness...

Teach him to sell his brawn and brain to the highest bidders but never to put a price-tag
on his heart and soul.

Teach him to close his ears to a howling mob and to stand and fight if he thinks he's right.

Treat him gently, but do not cuddle him, because only the test of fire makes fine steel.

Let him have the courage to be impatient...let him have the patience to be brave.

Teach him always to have sublime faith in himself, because then he will have sublime faith
in mankind.

This is a big order, but see what you can do...He is such a fine fellow, my son!

*This is an extract of a letter written by Abraham Lincoln to the Headmaster of his son's school. The
values and ideals he speaks of continue to be relevant even today.*

साहित्य और पढ़ना सीखाना के इर्द-गिर्द कुछ बातें

शुशील शुक्ल

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शिक्षा का अधिकार मिल जाने से अब हमारी आँखों ने इस सपने के लिए तो जगह बनानी शुरू कर दी है कि अपने देश का हर बच्चा आने वाले चार-पाँच सालों में स्कूल में प्रवेश पा सकेगा। इस सपने को पूरा करने के लिए हम अपने ज़्यादातर स्कूलों को बच्चों के लिए एक सुखद केन्द्र के रूप में नहीं ढाल पाए हैं। नित नया सीखने का उत्साह से भरे बच्चे एक दिन स्कूल में प्रवेश लेने के लिए घर से निकलते हैं। उस घर से, जहाँ उन्हें प्रश्न पूछने की, अपने मन का कुछ करने की, ज़िद करने की, लाड़-दुलार की, मान-मनौबल की सीमित ही सही, पर आज़ादी हासिल होती है सामाजिक-आर्थिक रूप से कमज़ोर घरों में बच्चों की ज़िन्दगी इन्ती सुखद भले ही नहीं हो, पर वे घर पर एक अत्यंत सक्रिय सदस्य की भूमिका निभा रहे होते हैं। जहाँ मध्यवर्गीय बच्चे घर के कामों का खेल खेलते हैं, वहाँ ये बच्चे सचमुच घर के कामों में हाथ बँटा रहे होते हैं। वस्तु स्थिति यह है कि इन दोनों ही तरह के बच्चों को स्कूल पहुँचकर निराशा हाथ लगती है। उनके तमाम अनुभव स्कूल में किसी काम नहीं आते। स्कूल इन तमाम अनुभवों को नज़रंदाज़ कर, पोंछकर पढ़ाई शुरू करता नज़र आता है। अपने जीवन में भाषा से अच्छा खासा काम चला रहे बच्चे को — अ — से पढ़ना शुरू करना होता है। एक तरह से स्कूल उसके जीवन में चार-पाँच सालों को ही नज़रंदाज़ कर देता है। और फिर स्कूल में बच्चों का पुनर्जन्म होता है। एक-एक बच्चे का दुहरा जीवन शुरू होता है — स्कूल का जीवन और स्कूल से बाहर का जीवन। इन दानों जीवनों में कोई संवाद नहीं होता है।

फिर शुरू होती है स्कूली जीवन के सबसे दुखदायी और कठिन काम की शुरुआत। पढ़ना सीखने की शुरुआत। स्कूल में रोज़-रोज़ एक जीवन शुरू होता है जिसमें बच्चे को हर पल इस बात का अहसास दिलाया जाता है कि उसे क्या-क्या नहीं आता। वह शायद कहना चाहता है कि उसे हाथी पढ़ना नहीं आता, पर वह हाथी के बारे में सुनी एक पूरी कहानी सुना सकता है। पर स्कूल के बोर्ड पर लिखा हाथी कहानी के हाथी को पहचानने से इनकार कर देता है। धीरे-धीरे जीवन के तमाम अनुभव, समझ, तर्क सब स्कूल में आते ही सूख जाते हैं। स्कूली पढ़ाई अब बच्चों के अनुभवों को झंकृत नहीं करती बल्कि वह एक जानकारी की तरह या रह जाने लगती है और पढ़ने का काम व्यर्थ लगने लगता है।

पढ़ना सीखाने का काम आसान भले ही न हो, पर उसे रोमांचक, रुचिकर बनाया जा सकता है। सबसे पहली शर्त तो बच्चे के पूर्व, ज्ञान, उसके अनुभव, उसकी भाषा को मान्यता देने की है। यह मान्यता ही वह एकमात्र बिन्दु हो सकता है, जहाँ से चलकर पढ़ना सीखने की तरफ कोई रास्ता जाता है। पढ़ना सिखाने की शुरुआत किस्से-कहानियाँ सुनने-सुनाने से होनी चाहिए, क्योंकि तब बच्चे अपने तमाम अनुभव के साथ आपकी बात सुनने तथा अपनी सुनाने के लिए प्रस्तुत हो सकेंगे। यह दुतरफा मामला बच्चों में शुरुआती विश्वास पैदा करेगा। इस विश्वास पर पाँव रखकर ही बच्चे उन अनजानी, अमूर्त आकृतियों से जूझते चले आएँगे, जो पढ़ना सीखने के रास्ते में आएँगी। यही विश्वास उन्हें अंदाज़, अनुमान लगाने की हिम्मत

देगा, जो पढ़ना सीखने में आगे एक प्रमुख हथियार साबिता होगा।

किस्से-कहानियाँ

किस्से-कहानियाँ किताबों से सुनाने की पहल हो सकती हैं। इसके लिए साहित्य के चुनाव में थोड़ी-बहुत सावधानी रखने के ज़रूरत होगी। एक शिक्षक, जो बच्चों से किस्से-कहानियाँ सुन चुका होगा, उन्हें इस बात का अंदाज़ा लगाने में ज़्यादा मुश्किल नहीं होगी कि किस किस्म का साहित्य बच्चों को आकर्षित करेगा। फिर भी शुरुआत तौर पर साहित्य ऐसा हो, जिसमें बच्चों के द्वंद्व, अनुभव, कल्पना आदि शामिल हों। बच्चे पात्रों से खुद को ज़्यादा जोड़ पाते होंगे, इसलिए शुरुआत में इस बात का ख्याल रखना चाहिए। हम सालों-साल बच्चों को वर्णमाला से पढ़ना सीखते रहे। अक्षर-ज्ञान और उसे जोड़कर शब्द को उसकी ध्वनि के साथ पहचानने भर से हमारी पढ़ने की परिभाषा बन जाती रही। अर्थ तक पहुँचने और पढ़ने के आनन्द पाने की कड़ी पढ़ना सीखने की प्रक्रिया से गुम रही। हमें कभी इस शुरुआती दौर के लिए किताबों की ज़रूरत पेश ही नहीं आई। इसलिए हमारे पास आज बेहतरीन 100-200 किताबें उन बच्चों के लिए नहीं हैं, जो पढ़ना सीखना शुरू कर रहे हैं। एक ऐसी छोटी किताब जिसे पढ़कर न सिर्फ बच्चे के अनुभव ज्ञानझना जाएँ, बल्कि वह आत्मविश्वास से भी भर जाए कि उसने एक किताब पूरी पढ़ डाली है।

आमतौर पर पढ़ना सीख रहे बच्चों को ध्यान में रखकर कृत्रिम किस्म की चित्रकथाएँ तैयार की जाती हैं।



चित्र: शिक्षक और बच्चे

कहानियाँ जो मात्र एक विवरण बन कर रह जाती हैं, जिसमें कोई मोड़ नहीं आता, कोई तनाव पैदा नहीं होता। कोई कशमकश पाठक को हासिल नहीं होती। न किसी तर्क की ज़रूरत पड़ती है न कोई कल्पना की उड़ान का आनंद व रोमांच हासिल होता है। असल में ऐसे साहित्य से भाषा का अपना काम भी पूरा नहीं होता। भाषा सिर्फ किसी बात को सम्प्रेषित ही नहीं करती बल्कि वह कल्पना में, किसी चीज़ को महसूस करने में, किसी चीज़ से जुड़ने में, सोचने में, तर्क करने आदि में काम आती है। यही भाषा की बड़ी भूमिकाएँ समझी भी जाती हैं। साहित्य में भाषा अक्सर अपनी इन सब भूमिकाओं के साथ सामने आती है। यानी पढ़ना सिखाने में साहित्य की बेहद उपयोगी भूमिका हो सकती है।

एक कहानी, जो बच्चों को पढ़ाई-सुनाई जा रही है, उसमें बच्चों को तर्क करने, कल्पना करने, किसी चीज़ से जुड़ने आदि के कितने अवसर मिल रहे हैं ? अच्छे साहित्य में पाठक के लिए जगह-जगह प्रवेश करने, उसमें शामिल होने की रिक्त जगहों में प्रवेश करके साहित्य का आनन्द लेते हैं। साहित्य की यही गुंजाइशें एक ही कहानी को बार-बार थोड़े-से फेर-बदल के साथ सुनने का रोमांच बनाए रखती हैं। पढ़ना सीख रहे बच्चों के लिए यह न सिर्फ एक रियाज़ होता है, बल्कि वे पिछली बार सुनी हुई बात का एक तरह से परीक्षण भी बार-बार सुनकर करते हैं। इसमें वे पिछली बार सुनी काहनी में आगे क्या होगा, इस बात का अंदाज़ा लगाकर उसे डिकोड कर लेने का आनंद भी पाते हैं। ऐसी छोटी-छोटी बातें उनके पढ़ना सीखने के सफर को कुछ रोचक बनाए रखती हैं। एक कहानी जो "एक चालाक लोमड़ी थी" से शुरू होती है; वह इन सब अवसरों को, संभावनाओं को कूचल डालती है। आमतौर पर इस तरह के वाक्यों से भरी कहानियों में पाठक को डिकोड करने के लिए ज़्यादा कुछ नहीं मिलता है।

साहित्य पाठकों को कुछ समय के लिए मुक्त भी करता है। पढ़ते समय एक पाठक अपनी दुनिया, पहचान को थोड़ी देर के लिए लगभग स्थगित कर कहानी या कविता की दुनिया में प्रवेश करता है। वह किरदारों से जुड़ जाता है। उनके एवज़ में कहानी में आई चुनौतियों का सामना करने लग जाता है। एक ऐसी स्थिति का सामना करने के लिए अनायास ही तैयार हो जाता है जो कहानी में चल रही होती है। एक तरह से यह समझ बच्चों



चित्र - सुखराम बंस
विषय - साहित्य, जी. साहित्य

को, जो अक्सर आजादी के लिए तड़पते रहते हैं, बहुत रास आता है। कहानी की दुनिया में उन पर कोई बंदिश नहीं होती। वे जैसा चाहें अर्थ लगाएँ, जो चाहें फैसला करें। जिसे चाहें ठीक समझें। जिस किरदार के साथ चाहें खड़े हो जाएँ। अच्छी कहानी या कविता बार-बार नियमों-कायदों को तोड़कर उनके पार चली जाती है; तो अच्छा साहित्य यह सब मौके पाठक को देता है।

बच्चों को साहित्य का यह गुण बेहद आकर्षित करता होगा। पढ़ना सीख रहे बच्चों को साहित्य की यह तासीर खींचती है। वे इन अनुभवों से गुज़रने के लिए पढ़ने की तरफ आकर्षित होते हैं। साहित्य का काम यहीं खत्म नहीं हो जाता। वह कहानी के पढ़ लेने के बाद भी पाठक के भीतर जारी रहता है। और अनजाने ही भाषा की मरम्मत चलती रहती है। बच्चों के लिए बहुतायत में कविताएँ लिखी जाती हैं, पर उनमें साहित्य के ये गुण गुम रहते हैं। रटे-रटाए विषयों पर महज तुकबन्दी साध कर लिखी गई कविताओं से बच्चे खुद को जोड़ नहीं पाते हैं। कविता का एक गुण यह है कि वह किसी पूर्वानुमान से परे चली जाती है। इस तरह की कविताएँ पढ़ना सीख रहे बच्चों को शायद उतनी मदद न कर पाएँ। पर कविताएँ अगर किसी घटना पर आधारित होंगी तो बच्चों को कविता में चल रही कहानी दोगुना मज़ा दे सकती है। पढ़ना सीखने में अनुमान का बहुत महत्व है। इस तरह की कविताओं में पाठकों को दो तरह से अनुमान लगाने में सहायता मिलती है। एक तो कविता का ढाँचा उन्हें मदद करता है दूसरा कविता में चल रहा घटनाक्रम अनुमान लगाने में मदद करेगा। इस तरह वे कविता के रूप (फॉर्म) की खूबसूरती का भी आनन्द उठा पाएँगे और उसमें चल रही घटना। अनुभव भी ले पाएँगे। बच्चों के लिए खासतौर पर हिन्दी में जो साहित्य लिखा जा रहा है; उनमें से ज़्यादातर बेहद सपाट हैं। उसमें बच्चों की उनकी अपनी दुनिया, जिसमें वे रह रहे हैं, की कोई झलक नहीं मिलती है। साहित्य में बच्चों के सामने एक बनाबटी दुनिया सामने आती रहती है। बच्चों के द्वंद्व, संघर्ष, कल्पनाओं की इसमें कोई जगह नहीं है। क्या बच्चे ऐसे साहित्य से खुद को जोड़ पाते होंगे? अधिकतर बाल साहित्य में मध्यवर्गीय पारंपरिक जीवन शैली का गान दिखता है। क्या यह बात सामाजिक-आर्थिक रूप से कमज़ोर पृष्ठभूमि के

बच्चों का पढ़ना सीखने के संघर्ष में कुछ और इजाफा कर देती होगी? यह साहित्य उनके अपने जीवन अनुभवों से जुड़ नहीं पाता होगी? उनकी जीवनशैली व मूल्यों के प्रति यह साहित्य कितना संवेदनशील बना रहता होगा? पढ़ना सीखना तब कुछ आसान हो सकता है; जब पढ़े या सुने जा रहे साहित्य में पाठक शामिल हो जाए। पढ़ी हुई सामग्री बच्चे के अनुभव से जुड़कर मन को तरंगित करे। अर्थ निर्माण तक पहुँचकर ही तो पढ़ना सीखने का सफर पूरा होता है। यानी पढ़ना सीख रहे पाठकों के लिए शुरुआती दौर में ऐसा साहित्य मदद करता है, जो उनके परिवेश से सीधे जुड़ा हो।

दो कविताएँ

1. छीक उर्फ़ कक के ओवो...

cq t d le gq kuawd ks
, d j k +og bruk N h k
bruk N h k bruk N h k
bruk N h k bruk N h k
l c i U s f x j x, i M +d s
/k k k g q k m l y a v k l h d k A

श्रीनाथ सिंह की यह कविता शुरुआती पाठकों के लिए एक बेहतर कविता मानी जाएगी। यह हमारे जीवन के एक बहुत आम अनुभव जुकाम के बारे में है। ऐसी कविताएँ हमें एक साथ बच्चों को अपने जीवन में प्रवेश कराने के कई मौके उपलब्ध कराती हैं। शायद ही कोई बच्चा होगा, जिसके पास जुकाम का काई न कोई किस्सा नहीं होगा। यह कविता झट से उस अनुभव को जगा देगी। भाषा अपने तमाम पहलुओं के साथ काम में लग जाएगी। बच्चे इस कविता को पढ़ते हुए एक पैर अपने अनुभवों पर रखे हुए अपना दूसरा पैर कल्पना पर रखने के लिए बढ़ा देंगे। इतना छींका, इतना छींका इतना छींका.... यह ठेठ बच्चों का किसी बात को बताने का तरीका होता है। वे अक्सर इस प्रयोग का इस्तेमाल करते हैं। पेड़ के सब पत्ते गिरने का अनुभव उन्हें है। आँध्र का भी है। पर छींक से आँधी आने की कल्पना बेहद आनन्ददायी होगी। ऐसी कविताओं पर बच्चे बार-बार आते हैं। इस एक छोटी-सी कविता ने उनके परिवेश की कितनी चीज़ों को एक साथ लाकर खड़ा कर दिया। इस कविता में बच्चों को

शामिल होने की कितनी जगहें साफ नज़र आती हैं। जब पेड़ को पता चला होगा कि यह नंदू की छींक थी, आँधी नहीं, तब उसे कैसा लगा होगा? कविता की आखिरी पंक्तियों में पेड़ को धोखा हो जाने की बात है। स्कूली किताबें—कॉपियाँ एक जैसी होती हैं। कई बार बच्चे अपने किताब या कॉपी के धोखे में अपने दोस्त की किताब या कॉपी उठा लाते हैं। इस एक सामान्य घटना पर अब्बास किरस्तामी ने एक बेहद खूबसूरत फिल्म बनाई है। ऐसे कई अनुभवों को यह कविता कक्षा में लाने का एक मौका उपलब्ध कराती है। कविता में अर्थों की झिलमिल भी बनी रहती है। जब एक बच्चा पेड़ को हुए इस धोखे से हैस रहा होगा, तब हो सकता है उसके ठीक बगल में बैठा बच्चा पेड़ के सब पत्ते गिर जाने से उदास हो जाए। पेड़ के सब पत्ते गिर गए होंगे, तो क्या पेड़ सूख गया होगा? वह कौन—सा पेड़ होगा? क्या उस पर किसी चिड़िया



का घोंसला होगा? हो सकता है कोई बच्चा नंदू की मुश्किल के बारे में सोच रहा हो और कोई यह सोच रहा हो कि अगर नंदू की छींकने से पेड़ के पत्ते गिर गए, तो और आसपास क्या—क्या हुआ होगा? क्या सचमुच किसी की छींक से पेड़ के सारे पत्ते झड़ सकते हैं? साहित्य के रचे इस झूठ ने कल्पना को कितनी उड़ानें दे दीं। बच्चे जब झूठ बोलते हैं, तो हम परेशान हो जाते हैं। पर एक तरह देखें तो वे एक ऐसे आनंददायी रियाज़ में लगे हैं जहाँ उन्हें उस घटना को गढ़ने का मौका मिल रहा है जो असल में घट नहीं रही है। इस तरह के झूठ भविष्य के किसी सत्य को खड़े होने के लिए ज़मीन तैयार करते हैं। इसलिए साहित्य के बारे में अकसर कहा जाता है कि वह एक सच प्रकट करने के लिए झूठ पर झूठ गढ़ता चला जाता है। कुल—मिलाकर कहना यह है कि पढ़ना सिखा रहे शिक्षक को यह कविता पर्याप्त मौके देती है।

एक और कविता का उदाहरण लेते हैं, जो बच्चों की बेहद पसंदीदा कविता बन चुकी है।

2. वाव वने

i 5 si k g k s r k s p k j p u s y k r s
p k j e a l s, d p u k r k s d k s f k y k r s
r k s d k s f k y k r s k s v k o & v k o x k r k
v k o v k o x k r k r k s c M t e t k v k r k A

i 5 si k g k s r k s p k j p u s y k r s
p k j e a l s, d p u k r k s d k s f k y k r s
r k s d k s f k y k r s k s i B i j f c B r k k
i B i j f c B r k r k s c M t e t k v k r k A

i 5 si k g k s r k s p k j p u s y k r s
p k j e a l s, d p u k r k s d k s f k y k r s
p u s y k s f k y k r s r k s n k r V W t r k k
n k r V W t r k r k s c M t e t k v k r k A

यह कविता इंसान की उस शाश्वत इच्छा को विनम्र स्वीकार है कि काश ऐसा होता तो हम फलौं चीज़ कर लेते। मन में रोज़ ही ऐसी लहरें अपने किनारों से टकराकर फिर—फिर लौटती हैं। हम जीवन जीने की शुरुआत को स्थगित किए रहते हैं कि वह जो अब तक न हुआ है पहले वह हो जाए। हमारी दुनिया में एक बेहद बड़ी संख्या उन लोगों की है; जिनका तो जैसे जीवन ही इस बढ़त के साथ शुरू होता है कि पैसे पास होते। र k --A उसका जीवन ही जैसे रागों के लगने से रह जाने में ही पूरा बीत जाता है। बचपन भी बेहद बंदिशों में लिपटा दौर होता है। वहाँ भी इच्छाओं की बढ़त का अनन्त आकाश है; इसीलिए शायद यह बच्चों की बेहद पसंदीदा कविता बन चुकी है। ऊपरी तौर पर देखें तो उसकी बुनावट में अनुप्रास का चमत्कार भी है — पैसे—पास का और चार—चने का।

हमारा सारा सीखना ही दोहरावों से भरा पड़ा है। बचपन में ऐ शब्द तक पहुँचने के लिए उस शब्द के आसपास आ—आकर ठहर जाते हैं। उसके आस—पड़ोस के शब्दों तक जाते हैं। एक तरह से उस शब्द तक पहुँचने के रास्ते पर बार—बार आना—जाना होता है। और बार—बार आकर और वापिस जाकर हम उस शब्द को सीखते हैं। इस कविता के अर्थों में ही नहीं उसकी बाहरी बुनावट में भी गजब का दोहराव है। हम बुनावट को

समझने लगते हैं और कविता जहाँ खत्म हो जाती है; उससे एक कदम बढ़ाकर कहते हैं कि पैसे पास होते तो चार चने लाते... चार में से एक चना किसी को खिलाते.... किसी को खिलाते तो वह कुछ करता, वह कुछ करना तो बड़ा मज़ा आता।

यह दोहराव हमें अपनी लोककथाओं की याद भी दिलाता है। जिसमें कथा आठ-दस चरणों में चलती है। हर चरण से पहले कथा पूर्व के हर चरण को फिर से दुहराती है। पढ़ना सीख रहे बच्चों के लिए ये लोककथाएँ एवं दोहराव की तासीर वाली कविताएँ बहुत भाती होंगी, इसलिए भी कि इनमें भाषा का एक खेल चलता रहता है। जैसे वे झूला झूलते हैं। हर बार झूला नई ऊँचाई पर जाता है। पर हर बार वापिस उसी पुराने रास्ते पर भी आता है। बार-बार आगे बढ़ना और बार-बार वहाँ चले जाना, जहाँ से चलना शुरू किया था। लोककथाओं के इस दोहराव वाले तत्त्व में ऐ और तरह की गुंजाइश भी छुपी हुई है। जब कहानी अपने चरम या अंतिम दौर में पहुँच जाती है तब वह एक बार फिर अपनी उस सबसे पहली पंक्ति तक आती है; जहाँ से वह कभी शुरू हुई थी। जैसे हर चरण में वह थोड़ी आगे बढ़ती है और फिर अपने अभी-अभी जुड़े नए पाठक के लिए दुबारा शुरू से कथा सुनाने चली आती है।

बुढ़िया की रोटी कहानी की बुढ़िया को ले लीजिए। वह पेड़ के पास जाती है कि कौआ उसकी रोटी ले गया है। फिर वह लकड़हारे के पास जाती है। पर लकड़हारे को वह यह बताना नहीं भूलती कि वह पहले पेड़ के पास गई थी। और पेड़ ने उसे मदद करने से मना कर दिया है।

जीवन में चार चनों का क्या मोल? तो यह कविता एक किस्म की बेमतलब का जादू रचती है। इसे फिजूलियत यानी नॉनसेंस कहते हैं। इसकी वजह से इस कविता में अतिरिक्त मिठास आ गई है। सिर्फ चार चने में से एक चना खिलाने की बात नहीं है; बल्कि कविता का पूरा बनाव ही नॉनसेंसिकल है। एक चने का तोते को खिलाना और उसका टाँव-टाँव गाना। और टाँव-टाँव गाने से मजे का आना। या चूहे के चने चबाने से उसका दाँतों का टूटना और उसमें मज़ा आना। अगर इस कविता का स्वभाव नॉनसेंसिकल न होता; तो चूहे के दाँत टूटने पर मजे आने की बात खटकती। पर कविता की अन्तर्वस्तु हमें चुपचाप यह बात बता देती है कि इसमें मतलब निकालने की ज़रूरत

नहीं है। ठीक वैसे ही जैसे — लकड़ी की काठी वाले गीत में घोड़े की दुम पे जो माना हथौड़ा में है। ऐसी कविताएँ पढ़ना सीख रहे बच्चों के लिए कमाल का काम करती दिखती हैं। इसमें बच्चों को शामिल होते चले जाने की असंख्य जगहें हैं। कभी आपने इस बात पर गौर किया है कि हम सभी को ये फिजूलियत भरी रचनाएँ क्यों पसंद आती हैं? शायद इसलिए कि जहाँ अच्छे साहित्य में पाठक को शामिल होने के लिए जगह-जगह खाली स्थान रहते हैं वहीं एक नॉनसेंस रचना पूरी की पूरी तरह पाठक के लिए ऐसे रिक्त स्थानों से भरी पड़ी रहती है। रिक्तियों से बुनी, अर्थों से खाली कविता।

दो कहानियाँ

1. पैसे पास होते तो ... एक बुढ़िया कहानी

आपको याद है एक एक महान कहानी ईदगाह में हामिद के पास कितने पैसे होते हैं? पर वह कहानी इस कविता के ठीक उलट खड़ी रहती है। वह यथार्थ का चित्रण करती है। उसमें भी इस कविता का स्वभाव है। साहित्य व कलाओं — खासतौर पर संगीत, चित्रकला आदि में वह



स्पष्ट दिखता है। किसी बात को कहने के लिए उसका इर्द-गिर्द रचते जाना। और हर बार उसका इर्द-गिर्द रचते हुए, उसके करीब पहुँचते जाना। रचना के तत्त्व के इर्द-गिर्द तक बार-बार पहुँचते-पहुँचते एक ऐसा चरम आता है; जब कोई इर्द-गिर्द बाकी नहीं बचता। हम रचना तक पहुँच जाते हैं। रचना में असल मज़ा तत्त्व तक पहुँचने के लिए रचे गए इर्द-गिर्द के संघर्ष में है। हामिद क्या खरीदता है वह इतना आनन्द पैदा नहीं करता, जितना यह कि वह क्या-क्या खरीद सकता था, पर नहीं खरीदता। यह इर्द-गिर्द ही तो आखिर में हामिद के चिमटा खरीदने को मीठा बनाती है। यह एक सार्थक रचना है। तर्क पेश करती है। हामिद का यह व्यवहार हमें कृत्रिम लग सकता था। अगर यह रचना उद्घाटित नहीं करती कि अमीना के अलावा हामिद का इस दुनिया में कोई नहीं है। यानी हामिद को बचपन नसीब नहीं हुआ। वह जीवन के संघर्ष में अपनी उमर से पहले ही बड़ा हो गया है। और वह बताता है कि ऐसे बच्चे और उनके परिवार आग से खेलते हुए रोटी हासिल करते हैं। हामिद उसी रोटी को पकड़ने के लिए ही तो चिमटा खरीदता है। चिमटा देखकर अमीना की आँखें क्यों भरती हैं? क्या यह सोचकर कि कैसे हामिद उमर से पहले ही व्यस्क हो गया?

साहित्य अपनी इस तमाम संभावनाओं के साथ पाठक के समझ प्रस्तुत होता है। भाषा अपने तमाम छरहरे रूप में साहित्य में सामने आती है। यह हमारी नाकमायावी रही है कि हम साहित्य के इन गुणों को बच्चों के लिए ज़्यादातर रचनाओं में शामिल नहीं कर पाए। साहित्य एक ऐसी जगह की तरह बच्चों के सामने पेश आए जिसमें उन्हें लुका-छिपी का खेल खेलने के लिए छुपने की पर्याप्त जगहें उपलब्ध हों।

2. हलीम चला चाँद पढ़...

हलीम ने एक दिन सोचा, आज मैं चाँद पर जाऊँगा। वह रॉकेट के कारखाने में गया और एक रॉकेट में बैठकर चल पड़ा। चलते-चलते अँधेरा हो गया। हलीम को डर लगने लगा। उसको तो चाँद तक का रास्ता पता नहीं था। थोड़ी देर में उसे चाँद दिखा और वह खुश हो गया। चाँद पर हलीम को खूब सारे गड्डे दिखे और बड़े-बड़े पहाड़ भी, लेकिन वहाँ कोई पेड़ या जानवर नहीं था, वहाँ लोग भी नहीं थे। हलीम ने सोचा कि यह भी कोई जगह है। चलो वापिस

घर चलें। वह रॉकेट में बैठकर घर लौट आया। चाँद बच्चों का बेहद पसंदीदा है। चाँद एक दूरी है। वे सारी चीज़ें जो दिखती तो अक्सर हैं पर उन्हें हासिल नहीं किया जा सकता है। चाँद ऐसी सारी इच्छाओं का प्रतिनिधित्व करता है। दिन में बच्चे बाहर खेल-कूद सकते हैं। पर रात में तो उन्हें घर में ही रहना पड़ता है। बाहर न जा पाने की मजबूरी में चाँद दिखता है। रात में बाहर निकला हुआ। यह कहानी चाँ पर चले जाने की है। हलीम ने एक दिन सोचा कि चाँद पर जाऊँगा। यह पंक्ति दुनिया के हर बच्चे की मन की बात होते हुए भी एक बेहद निजी बात बनी रहती है, क्योंकि हर बच्चे के मन में चाँद की एक अलग तस्वीर होती है। चाँद के अलग अनुभव होते हैं और चाँद से मिलने के रास्ते भी अलग। ज़्यादातर साहित्य में किसी न किसी रूप में चाँद ही बच्चों के पास आता है। बच्चों के इतने सक्रिय किरदार कम देखने में आते हैं। इस किताब के चित्र बेहद रोचक हैं। और उनसे मिलकर कहानी पूरी होती है। किताब के पहले ही पन्ने पर हलीम झाड़ू लगाने के विवरण तो हमारे हिन्दी समाज की बड़ी-बड़ी किताबों से गुम है। जैसे यह कोई काम ही न हो। झाड़ू लगाना बच्चों का पसन्दीदा पहला-पहला काम होता है। जिसमें उन्हें इस बात पर इतराने का मौका मिलता है कि वे बड़ों के कामों में से कुछ खुद निपटा सकते हैं। वे कामों को खेलने की जगह उन्हें सचमुच करना चाहते हैं। खैर, तो इस किताब में बच्चे समझ जाते हैं कि असल में हलीम उन्हीं की तरह चाँद पर चले जाने के सपने देख रहा है। चाँद का रास्ता भले ही उनका जाना-पहचाना नहीं है पर हलीम जिस रास्ते पर चल रहा है वह उनका जाना-पहचाना है; क्योंकि वे खुद अक्सर इस रास्ते से चाँद पर आया-जाया करते हैं। अक्सर बच्चों की या कई बार तो बड़ों की किताबों में भी यह स्पष्ट रूप से चित्र बनाकर दिख देते हैं कि अब फलों किरदार सपने देख रहा है; और जो बात कही जा रही है वह उनके सपने में कही जा रही है। इस किताब में ऐसा नहीं है। यह किताब पाठकों पर ज़्यादा भरोसा करती है। साहित्य में यह गुंजाइश बनी रहती है कि वह सुदूर सपने की बात को आज में विश्वसनीय रूप से घटित होते हुए दिखा देते हैं। यानी खेल, सपने और यथार्थ को यह किताब एक ही तल पर लाकर खड़ा कर देती है। हलीम झाड़ू पर बैठकर चाँद पर चला जाता है। रास्ता लम्बा है, क्योंकि वहाँ जब पहुँचे तब तक रात हो चुकी है। रात हुई तो चाँद निकला। तभी तो



पता चला कि चाँद है कहाँ।
वरना दिन में पहुँचते तो पता कैसे
चलता? पर यह खेल में चाँद पर जाना है।
इसलिए इस खेल का अन्त यह नहीं हो सकता
कि हलीम वहीं रुक जाए, क्योंकि हलीम तो अपने
घर पर झाड़ू लगा रहा है। उसे जल्दी ही अपने
इस खेल को खत्म करके दूसरा खेल खेलना है
या कोई और सपना देखते हुए काम पर लग
जाता है। यानी उसे वापिस धरती पर आना है।
पर वह क्यों वापिस आए? क्योंकि चाँद पर तो
गड़बड़े-पहाड़ हैं..... कोई जानवर नहीं, कोई पेड़
नहीं, लोग नहीं..... भला यह भी कोई रहने की
जगह हुई। यह किताब बताती है कि वह भले ही
बच्चों के खेल-खेल की कहानी हो पर उसमें एक
तर्क होना चाहिए। यह बात भी उसे याद रहती
है कि रहने लायक दुनिया सिर्फ इंसानों से ही
नहीं बन जाती है। वह एक ऐसी दुनिया की तरफ
लौटना चाहता है; जहाँ इंसानों के साथ-साथ पेड़
और जानवर भी होंगे। 'हलीम चला चाँद पर' नाम
की यह किताब बच्चों के स्वभाव की किताब है।
जैसे घर के बाहर एक आँगन होता है। घर के
सबसे नजदीक का बाहर, जहाँ बच्चों को बाहर
चले जाने का रियाज़ करने का मौका मिलता है।
यह किताब एक तरफ से सिफारिश करती है कि
स्कूल से लगा उसका एक आँगन होना चाहिए,
जहाँ बच्चे उससे बाहर निकलना सीख पाएँ।
स्कूल में सबको एक तरह से सम्बोधित करने का
माहौल के बीच साहित्य एक ऐसे कोने की तरह
स्थापित हो सकता है, जहाँ वह एक-एक बच्चे
को पहचान कर उससे बात कर सके।

बच्चों को पढ़ना सिखाने में कहानियाँ-कविताएँ
सुनाना बेहद उपयोगी हो सकता है; पर यह ज़रूरी
है कि साहित्य ऐसा हो जिसमें वे तमाम संभावनाएँ
हासिल हों, जिनके बारे में थोड़ी बातचीत हम
ऊपर कर चुके हैं। ऐसा साहित्य पाठक को खुद
की एक दुनिया की कल्पना करने को उकसाता
है। रचना में शामिल पाठक अनजाने ही रचना
में डूबता-उतराता रहता है। वह अपनी तमाम
इच्छाओं के साथ रचना में दाखिल हो जाता है।
वह वहाँ स्वतंत्र रूप से घूमना-फिरना चाहता

है। एक साहित्य के
अलावा खुद के इतने करीब चले आने की गुंजाइश
और कहाँ हासिल होती है? एक तरह से पाठक
इस यात्रा में नए सिरे से खुद को पहचानता है।
वह खुलकर अपने सामने प्रस्तुत होता है। बच्चे
अक्सर इस दुनिया में प्रवेश चाहते हैं जहाँ वे
पहले बड़ों के साथ गए थे, वहाँ वे अकेले जाना
चाहते हैं। वे रचना में अपनी पसंद की जगह थोड़ा
ठहरना चाहते हैं। वे किसी खास हिस्से को दुबारा
सुनना चाहते हैं। वे जहाँ मन करे उस जगह
कहानी को अपनी तरह पढ़ना चाहते हैं। ऐ नए
अर्थ में। जहाँ वही सच हो, जो वे सच समझते हैं,
पर ऐसा मौका तो तब मिलेगा जब वे उसे खुद
पढ़ना सीख जाएँगे। यह ललक बच्चों को जल्दी
पढ़ना सीखने के लिए प्रेरित करती होगी।

दो बातें चित्रों के बारे में....

पढ़ना सीख रहे बच्चों को कथा-कविता में
प्रस्तुत चित्रों से भी बड़ी मदद मिल सकती है।
किसी कहानी को पढ़कर उसके अर्थ तक पहुँचने
में चित्र मदद कर सकते हैं। पर चित्र रचना
के अर्थ खोलने वाले हों। हालाँकि ऐसे चित्रों
के उदाहरण कम मिलेंगे। चित्रांकन (इलेस्ट्रेशन)
आमतौर पर जो लिखित सामग्री में कहा जा रहा
है उसे या उसके किसी एक हिस्से को ही दुबारा
जस का तस कर देते हैं। इस तरह वे रचना में
कुछ जोड़ने की जगह शब्दों के माध्यम से पैदा की
जा रही थोड़ी-बहुत कल्पनाशीलता को भी एक
तस्वीर के रूप में प्रस्तुत कर खत्म कर देते हैं।
कई बार रचना में अर्थों का एक से ज़्यादा परतें
होती हैं। चित्रांकन रचना के इस पक्ष पर लगभग
चुप रहते हैं। वे न तो इसके अन्य अर्थों में पाठक
को प्रवेश के लिए कोई इशारा करते हैं न ही इन
छिपे हुए अर्थों को उकेरते हैं। आमतौर पर चित्र
किसी दृश्य को रूढ़ बना देते हैं तथा दूसरे वे
हरेक पाठक के लिए शब्दों में छिपे एक व्यक्तिगत
दृश्य को एकमात्र दृश्य में बदल देते हैं। इस धारा

की इन दोनों मान्यताओं की चुनौती चित्रांकनों को झेलनी पड़ती है।

अक्सर चित्रांकनों में आए किरदार भावरहित होते हैं। यानी वे खासतौर पर पढ़ना सीख रहे बच्चों को रचना का अर्थ पकड़ने के लिए किसी किस्म का अनुमान लगाने में मदद नहीं करते; जबकि किसी रचना के साँचाएँ चित्र को उसका हिस्सा बन जाता चाहिए। अच्छी रचना असल में पाठक के साथ घटित होती है। जीवंत अनुभव बन जाती है। चित्र भी घटित होने चाहिए।

ऐसे चित्र जीवन्तता पैदा करने में कहानी का हाथ बँटा सकते हैं। जैसे जीवन में हम किसी व्यक्ति का कोई किस्सा सुनकर उत्सुकता से भरे एक दिन उससे मिलना चाहते हैं, लगभग वैसे ही किसी किरदार की कहानी सुनकर चित्रों में उससे मिलना होता है। जैसे जीवन में उस व्यक्ति से मिलना किससे को और आगे बढ़ाना होता है वैसे ही चित्र होने चाहिए; जिनसे पाठक रचना से आगे का संवाद कायम कर सकें। बालसाहित्य के चित्रांकनों की एक और विसंगति यह है कि उनमें लिंग आधारित भेदभाव बेहद स्पष्ट रूप से दिखता है। वहाँ जैसे बच्चों का मतलब सिर्फ लड़के होते हैं। अगर कहीं किसी लड़की का किरदार आ भी जाए तो वह भी अपेक्षित अहमियत से नहीं आता। मसलन, पतंग उड़ा रहे लड़के की चरखी पकड़े कभी लड़की दिख सकती है। जिन थोड़ी जगहों पर स्त्रियों के चित्र दिखाई देते हैं वे भी जाने कितनी रुढ़ियों से लबालब होते हैं। मसलन, लड़कियों की ड्रेस गुलाबी होगी। उनके खेल तय हैं। उनके काम तय हैं। उनके शरीर की नापजोख तय है। एक लड़की, जो अभी पढ़ना सीख रही है उसे अपना अक्स चित्रों में कभी दिखाई नहीं देता। चित्र उसके अपने अनुभव जगत को तरंगित नहीं करते। इसी तरह चित्रांकनों में आमतौर पर हर जगह मध्यवर्गीय जीवन का गान मिलता है। बच्चे अक्सर टाई, सूट-बूट पहने मिलते हैं। महिलाएँ होंगी तो मध्यवर्गीय महिला होगी। पुरुष होगा तो मध्यवर्गीय पुरुष होगा। चित्रांकन न सिर्फ मध्यवर्गीय जीवन की भी एक रुढ़ छवि गढ़ते हैं बल्कि वे समाज की बहुलता को भी नज़रंदाज़ करते चलते हैं।

चित्रांकन बच्चों की भी एक रुढ़ छवि बनाने में एक भूमिका अदा कर रहे हैं। चित्रों को देखकर यह मान्यता उभरती है कि बच्चे

हमेशा चमकते-दमकते, खुश-खुश होने चाहिए। यह मान्यता शायद इस विचार से पनपती है कि बच्चे अपने आसपास से अप्रभावित रहते हैं। वे सोचते-विचारते नहीं हैं। वे समाज का सक्रिय हिस्सा नहीं हैं। वे फूल की तरह नाजुक-कोमल होते हैं। उनसे जीवन की बातें साझा नहीं करनी चाहिए। इसलिए समाज में कुछ भी घटे बच्चे खुश-खुश ही नज़र आने चाहिए। बच्चे अपने आसपास से दुखी नहीं हो सकते। हम उन्हीं बच्चों के बारे में यह मान्यता बनाते हैं, जो जीवन में हर समय किसी न किसी उठापटक में लगे रहते हैं। वे चीजों को समझ लेना चाहते हैं। खिलौना बाहरी तौर पर चलता है। पर उसका यह चलना उसके भीतर से नियंत्रित होता है। बच्चे यह समझ जाते हैं। वे खिलौने के भीतर जाकर बाहर का खेल जानना चाहते हैं। इतने सक्रिय व विवेकशील बच्चों को चित्र अक्सर स्थिर दिखाते हैं। उनके चित्रों में गति का अभाव रहता है।

बच्चों के बारे में यह भी एक आम मान्यता है कि उन्हें चटक रंग ही पसन्द आते हैं। रंगीन किताबों में न सिर्फ गाढ़े रंगों का प्रयोग आम है; बल्कि रंगों का आधिक्य इस कदर है कि वे आँखों को चुभने लगते हैं। आमतौर पर रंग और खाल जगह (स्पेस) का जादू गुम होता है। दो थापों के बीच की खाली जगह का प्रयोग देखने की मिठास पैदा करता है। पर इस बात से बेखबर चित्र पनने की सारी जगह खुद डकार जाते हैं। श्वेत-श्याम चित्रांकन का कल्पनाशील प्रयोग अब गुज़रे ज़माने की बात हो गई है। धूसर (ग्रे) रंगों के विभिन्न शेड भी अब कम ही दिखाई देते हैं। हालाँकि उनके कल्पनाशील प्रयोग जादू जगा सकते हैं। इस मामले में भी शायद बचपन की दोषपूर्ण अवधारणा हो रही है, जिसमें जीवन के महीन, बारीक, पेचीदा अनुभवों को न बच्चों के लिए लिखा जाता है न उन्हें चित्रित किया जाता है। जैसे साहित्य कभी-कभी अपने किसी किरदार के सहारे एक मनुष्य की तलाश में निकल जाता है। हर बार किसी रचना के माध्यम से लेखक व्यक्ति या जीवन को किसी खास समय और स्थान पर तलाश लेने का दावा करता है; पर हर बार व्यक्ति और जीवन उसकी पकड़ में आते-जाते उससे मुक्त हो जाता है और इस यात्रा में पाठक को मज़ा आता है। रंग एक जुदा माध्यम से इसी तलाश में भाग ले सकते हैं। वे एक ही रंग के विभिन्न शेड्स (रंगतों) के बारीक तानों-बानों से इस लुका-छिपी को खींच सकते हैं। खासतौर पर बच्चों की किताबों में रंग

साहित्य और पढ़ना सीखना के इर्द-गिर्द कुछ बातें

बिना शेड (रंगतें) के गाढ़े स्वरूप में लगभग इस अभिमान के साथ चित्र में चले आते हैं जैसे वे दो टूक सच बता देंगे।

यह बात कितनी सतही होगी— अगर कोई कहे कि आसमान नीला होता है और पेड़ हरे होते हैं। पेड़ अपने हरे के हजार रूपों में आकर खड़े हैं और आसमान जाने कितने रंग बदलता है। जैसे, रंगों के माध्यम से कोई आसमान और पेड़ों की तलाश में हर बार पहुँचते-पहुँचते रह जाता है। और हमारा पेड़ और आसमान देखना और पेड़ और आसमान समझना लगातार जारी रहता है।

बच्चों के लिए किए गए चित्रांकन आमतौर पर यथार्थवादी (रियलिस्टिक) होते हैं। उसमें एक कोना अनजाना नहीं हो सकता चित्र पूरी तरह

उघड़ा हुआ होता है; जिसमें किसी किस्म की तलाश सम्भव नहीं है। चित्रकार अपनी सारी ऊर्जा पाठक को पहली नज़र में डिकोड कर लेने वाले चित्रांकन बनाने में लगता है। उसमें पाठक की कल्पना के लिए कोई दरीचा नहीं खुला छोड़ता। जैसे कथा या कविता में एक शाब्दिक अर्थ के अलावा कई अन्य अर्थ हो सकते हैं, जो पाठक को उन तक बार-बार चले आने के लिए उकसाते हैं, वैसे ही चित्र होने चाहिए। पढ़ना सीखना एक ही शब्द पर, एक ही वाक्य पर, एक ही कहानी में बार-बार चले जाकर सम्भव होता है। कितना अच्छा हो कि साहित्य के साथ-साथ चित्र ऐसे बनें जिनमें अर्थों की एक झिलमिल शृंखला बनी रहे और पाठक इनकी तलाश में बार-बार उन तक आता रहे। जैसे एक ही नदी को देखना बार-बार जाकर भी पूरा नहीं होता है।

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Nayi Talim

The principal idea is to impart the whole education of the body, mind and soul through the handicraft that is taught to the children ~ Mahatma Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi came up with a novel manner of imparting education based on the pedagogic principle that knowledge and work are not separate. Even though, the system of education in the country was too nervous to experiment with his ideas at the national level, his method called Nayi Talim (which translates as New Education) is being followed in pockets to yield impressive results.

MY MAGICAL SCHOOL

Dr. Abhay Bang

As a child I went to an amazing school. Today, I feel helpless and sad for I'm unable to offer such an education to my son. "Our childhood was so different. Things have changed beyond recognition," old timers often moan and groan about the past. You may ask what was so different about my school?

Until standard ninth I studied in a school which followed the tenets of Nayi Talim (Basic Education) as enunciated by Gandhiji. Out of these I actually spent four years in the Nayi Talim School located in the Sevagram Ashram in Wardha. Education should not be confined within the four walls of the classroom mugging up boring subjects away from Mother Nature. Gandhiji's Nayi Talim strongly believed that children learnt best by doing socially useful work in the lap of nature. This is how children's minds would develop and they would imbibe a variety of useful skills. To implement such a system of education, Rabindranath Tagore at the behest of Gandhiji sent two brilliant teachers to Sevagram. Mr. Aryanakam came all the way from Sri Lanka and Mrs. Asha Devi from Bengal. This duo combined Gandhi's educational methodology with Tagore's love for nature

and the arts. My parents were involved with this educational experiment right from its onset. The school tried out many novel experiments in education. Hence, I will attempt to recall some of them.

Introduction to Animals

Today there is a great deal of talk about conserving nature and wildlife. Back then subject was not so much in vogue. Our Marathi teacher Mr. Patil used to conduct his classes sitting on the branch of a jackfruit tree. He used to regale us with stories from the jungle. He also told us tales about his experiences as a shikari.

Once by mistake he shot a pregnant she deer. Later, he simply couldn't bear to see the anguish in her eyes. This hurt him so deeply that he abandoned the gun for good. Later he only shot animals with his camera. Photographing wild animals became his passion and often he spent nights sitting alone on a machaan atop a tree to take a good shot. The stories he told us showed his deep love and compassion for animals. Listening to his stories was like going into a trance. It seemed as if we ourselves were trudging the jungle trail. Mr. Patil was a wordsmith and could paint the picture of the jungle



Nayi Talim School

in words. His stories made a deep impact on me and I soon started loving the jungle and its wildlife.

Nowadays chapter on animals in Marathi textbooks usually begins with a drab sentence, ‘Animals are living beings too.’ Will such inane words ever succeed in firing the children’s imagination and inspire them? The Gadchiroli District of Maharashtra in India is still verdant green with thick jungles. But even here the school curriculum seems totally disconnected with the jungle and its wildlife.

How I learnt Botany

In most schools botany is taught through textbooks with good photographs or line drawings or with live specimens stowed away in jars. Children try hard to mug-up difficult to pronounce botanical names of various species of plants and the different varieties of their leaves and roots. After the exams they soon forget all this jargon.

Our days there were a lot of gardens and fields near our school which boasted a vast variety of plant life. The best part



was that our teachers regularly took us for field visits and excursions. Our first introduction to any plant was by its common name so that we become “friends” with it. Later we observed its leaves, flowers and fruits more closely. In the end we would pluck fruits and berries and eat them. (Later in America I also ate and tasted “specimens” in class as an integral part of learning. But in America there was also a strong tradition of eating chocolates and drinking coke in the class). While eating jujube berries and mangos we would discuss similarities in these fruits. On seeing a drupe (fleshy fruit with a single hard stone inside) we would note its characteristics. Our daily wanderings in the gardens and fields brought us very close to nature and helped us understand the fine nuances of botany. The tall theories and intricate principles lay scattered in front of us in all their pristine glory. Our teachers inspired us to touch them, feel them and inspect them minutely. That’s why big words like ‘palmate, divergent and reticulate’ never ever foxed me. The reason was simple. The Papaya leaf which these high sounding words described was right there in front of me.

For the seventh class exam our teacher asked us to prepare a herbarium of various leaves and flowers. For this we scoured all the local gardens and neighborhood fields. Even twenty-five years later I starkly remember every single location and hideout where ‘palmate, divergent and reticulate’ leaves could be found. It still seems to me that those Papaya trees are standing right in front of my eyes. This had amazing consequences. During my college days I did not have to struggle at all to learn botany. In the final year, I stood first in botany in the entire college. When my professor praised me, I uttered these words silently, “Sir, I did not learn botany in college. I learnt it long back in my Sevagram School.”

Mathematics which is related to real life

“There is a water tank with two taps. One tap fills the tank, the other drains it out. How long will it take to fill up the tank?” Our books on mathematics are replete with such senseless questions. The moot question is, “Is there any link between mathematics and real life experiences?” Any clever person will get rid of the problem by closing the lower tap!

Let me share how I learnt the concept of volume in my school. It was mandatory for us to do constructive work for three hours every day. This was an integral part of our education. This was part of Gandhiji’s philosophy of “Bread Labour” where you laboured to grow your own food. It was also part of Vinoba Bhave’s vision of gaining various skills by doing socially productive work. For this I had to go and work in the cowshed for a couple of days. A new cowshed was then under construction. My teacher gave me the job of solving a specific practical problem. “Find the amount of water which a cow drinks in a day. How much water will be needed for all the cows in the cowshed? Then construct a water tank with the capacity to satiate the thirst of all the cows. Find out how many bricks will be required to construct such a tank? Then go and buy that number of bricks.” For over a week I grappled with this mathematical problem. There were numerous tanks with varying sizes. How to measure their volume? What was the relationship between the volume and the outer surface area of a tank? I actually constructed a water tank and in the process learnt a great deal of real life mathematics.

Learning through Cooking

In our school the students had to take turns to cook. Everyday a hundred people

ate in the school mess. The responsibility of cooking was handed by turn to a group of eight people. The expenditure per head per month was announced in advance. The food had to be tasty, nutritious and within the stipulated budget. Balancing these disparate acts was indeed a very tough task! Potatoes were the cheapest but they mainly contained starch and had to be discarded on nutritional grounds. By using the minimal quantity of oil stipulated by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) we would have exhausted our entire budget on oil itself! None of us had the experience of a good housewife. So we would struggle between food-value and money-value to try and strike a good balance. Many times our food plan and menu turned out to be utterly useless. It was just not possible to cook it. We often miscalculated the time it would take lentils to cook. Then at night while washing a mountain of dishes we felt like wounded soldiers! Also the next day’s cooking stared squarely in our face.

But in the process of cooking for the community we learnt three very important lessons. These were elements of a nutritious and balanced diet, economics, and the art of cooking. I still remember that coriander green leaves have 10600 units of vitamin A. In just a few days I learnt many valuable lessons working in the community kitchen. Unfortunately, I did not learn any such valuable lessons in the entire decade I spent at the medical college.

Experiments in Agriculture

While in school, each child was allocated a small patch of land to grow vegetables. We had to plough, weed, water and grow stuff on our own. There would often be a long line of students at the well wanting to draw water to irrigate their crops. So, many children had to water their fields only at night. At night the wail of the jackals



would frighten the children to no end. Still they would gather courage to go and water their fields in the dead of night. By growing our own fruits and vegetables we learnt the science of agronomy. Before applying any fertilizers we had to study their chemical compositions and for this we often went and had long chats with experienced farmers in our area. These included Mukteshwar Bhai who studied advanced paddy cultivation in Japan and Prem Bhai - a pioneer in cultivating grapes. Mr. Haveli's farm was just a stone's throw away. He had spent several years in Israel learning advanced agriculture. Often Mr. Anna Bhai Sahasrabuddhey would drop by and enlighten us on emerging techniques and economics of agriculture.

There was a healthy competition amongst the students. We would vie with each to maximise the yield in our vegetable patch. To increase yields we would add a lot of fertilizers to our crops which essentially meant pouring bucketsful of cow urine. By adopting this novel technique I grew a brinjal with an astounding weight of 1.75 kg. When I went to sell this super-sized brinjal in the Wardha market no one

touched it with a long pole thinking it had some weird disease!

Education for Life

The Nai Talim methodology is often accused of too much emphasis on manual labor, which becomes detrimental while acquiring knowledge. When Basic Education was introduced in the Madras Province people said, 'A lot of time is wasted on manual labor, and so our children are lagging behind in their studies.' Because of such accusations the then chief minister of Madras Rajaji had to resign. But what was the truth? People, who think children's minds should be cluttered with unrelated facts so that they could regurgitate them out in exams, must have certainly found some substance in this allegation. This group believed that if a child cannot list four different ways of making Sulfuric Acid then his knowledge base was weak. The Nai Talim students were found better than other children in every field of science which had a direct bearing with real life. But how did they fare in history, geography, political science and general knowledge when compared to the others?

I never learnt geography at school in any formal way. Sevagram was full of visitors who came from many lands. I used to hear to their stories and from this I learnt a great deal about many countries. I was fond of collecting postage stamps and this gave me interesting information about different countries. I read many travelogues of foreign lands which gave me a good "feel" for these countries. This is how I learnt geography. In the ninth grade I read Sharatchand's "*Pather Daavi*" and Jhaverchand Meghani's novel "*Prabhu Padhare*". The graphic descriptions of these novels later inspired me to travel to Burma. For me the subject of geography was totally alive and kicking and not drab and boring.



Our teachers taught us political science and general knowledge in a unique way. Every evening they would read us out important news items and interesting events from the newspapers. Later they would explain us the history and politics behind those events. One important new item at that time was America's retaliation to the weapons sent to Cuba by Russia. Then Second World War had broken out and the whole world was divided into two - capitalist and socialist camps. Our teachers would explain to us the reasons of mutual distrust between America and Russia and also the significance of the Cuban Revolution. Why Switzerland is called Helvetia? This question confronted me while collecting postal stamps. I read a number of books to find the answer and in the process I learnt a great deal about this beautiful country.

Testing Standards

Our school was the creative laboratory where several novel experiments were undertaken to implement Gandhiji's vision of education and Tagore's love for the arts. Apart from the written exams we were also tested in our abilities to cook, write and playact, give lectures to a large audience and write articles. The novelty of the experiment was the flexibility inside the classroom.

Every class has some clever and some not so clever students. Children did not have to appear for the same standard examination. This meant that in one single year I could

simultaneously pass seventh grade English, ninth grade Mathematics and tenth grade Marathi. Inculcation of good values was an integral part of this education. As part of our daily school activities we lived these values and imbibed respect for manual labor, self-reliance, equality and working for the common good. Apart from these humane values, students also took part in struggles waged in the country for social transformation. For a few days the school was shut and all the students went away to far flung villages in Bihar to take part in the Bhoodan Movement.

Culmination of the Saga

Whenever I recount these experiences of my old school people invariably ask, "Is that school still running? We too would like to send our children there." Gandhiji's vision of village industries did not find favor with the Indian government. Soon small scale village industries couldn't compete and lost out to big conglomerates. Because my school had no government recognition it couldn't last long. In the absence of any recognition, the children's future hung in uncertainty. So, parents withdrew their children from the school. Many parents who actively participated in the Bhoodan Movement had admitted their children to this school. Later, they also withdrew their children. Our government and society both, failed to appreciate the value of this unique school. Under such hostile circumstances no island of change can survive for long. The harsh and barren social terrain outside the school, gobbled it up. Finally, the Bhoodan Movement also withered away. Deep rooted selfishness in society and the race to compete finally rang a death knell of this creative endeavor. I have a deep desire to send my son to such a school. But where is that magic school?

A METHOD OF TEACHING ENUNCIATED BY MAHATMA GANDHI

Arvind Gupta

I will begin my relating my first encounter with Nayi Talim. I had gone to Kausani, a small quiet hill station in Uttarakhand. The majestic Himalayas as the backdrop and valleys hurling down as surprises were filled with stories of dynamic enterprising village women. They had protested against the opening of a liquor shop at one village. At another they had resisted deforestation. And the women were as conversant with the written as well as the spoken word. The most revealing encounter was on one of our treks. We met two young women who had come in the traditional attire including the scarf on their heads. They also carried with them was carrying some bramble too. With the spirit of reformation high in city-bred me, I asked them if they were literate. They said they were not and that they did not see why they should study.

For one hour I explained to them why. At the end of it, they casually revealed they were doing their Masters in Sociology. They were home on vacation! Imagine my shock and a feeling of utter foolishness. It took some time to reflect on the fact that these women's education had not alienated them from their roots. As I followed the source of such spirit in them, I was led to an uphill climb. No vehicle went up, you just had to trek it. It went up so many steps that I felt I would soon reach the heavens, and in a sense I did. I was at Laxmi Ashram at Kasauni. It was set up in 1946 by Katherine Helliman, better known in India as Sarla Behn, an ardent follower of Gandhi. Working with the people while building awareness for the fight for independence, Sarla Behn noticed the amount of hardship a woman from that region underwent. She decided, under Gandhi's encouragement and insistence,

that this was where an institution based on Nayi Talim should be set up. Beginning with three students, Lakshmi Ashram began imparting education to the people along Gandhian lines. Today the names of some of our major reformers and grass root workers figure in the school's alumni.

When we entered the complex that is spread over many acres of open land, we saw some students and their teachers preparing a bed for vegetable sowing. One student, far out across the hill, was out grazing cows. A few others were in the kitchen making breakfast. Within half hour when we had gone around the neat but Spartan complex, we came across yet another student. This time she was with a teacher trying to record the temperature from a barometer. The diverse activities were too distracting to the mind that went to see an ordinary school. So I sat down to hear and read about Nayi Talim, which was what the school was all about.

Gandhi, on his return to India from South Africa, protested against the failure of the modern system of education with the argument that the prevalent school curriculum, based on Macaulay system, was irrelevant to the country's context. Such an education, for the most part, alienated the students from their motherland and culture, yet did not even making them vocationally any worthier. Such students comprised almost eighty percent of India's rural folk.

As he ruminated the problem in his mind, he decided the way to go about education, true education, was to give literary training through vocational training. Gandhi believed that intelligent use of the bodily organs in a child provides



Lakshmi Ashram

Nayi Talim

the best and quickest way of developing his intellect. He went on to elaborate his idea with the example of a *takli*. The *takli* is the most primitive form of the spinning wheel. It is believed to be the precursor of spoke wheels and is still used in some parts of Bengal and Bihar. Most cloth in India was made of the *takli* yarn and the cottage industries still use it for finer counts of textiles. There you are—that was just Gandhi's idea. Talk about the *takli* and you have to talk of the wheel, science, the coming of mill cloth, the dying out of *taklis*, the regional variations of *taklis*, the areas where cotton is grown, and so on. History, geography, science and arithmetic are all taught through practical experience.

The education system should go to the people, should lure them for its value, both economic and intellectual. Gandhi advocated that primary education should be spread across seven years and should contain the entire syllabus that children study till they leave school and also include inculcating any one vocational skill in the pupil. Gradually vocation should serve a dual process; it should pay for the student's course and also develop his skill. All crafts that are widely practiced in India can be taught with minimal investment. The self-supporting aspect of Gandhi's New Education formula was in his opinion the only way to carry education to the cores of children in India awaiting education.

Another quote from Gandhi's writings would be in order: "Then as to primary education, my confirmed opinion is that the commencement of training by teaching

the alphabet and reading and writing, hampers their intellectual growth. I would not teach them the alphabet till they have had an elementary knowledge of history, geography, mental arithmetic and art. Through these three I should develop their intelligence. Question may be asked how intelligence can be developed through the *takli* or the spinning wheel. It can to a marvelous degree if it is not taught mechanically. When you tell a child the reason for each process, when you explain the mechanism of the *takli*, when you give him/her the history of cotton and its connection with civilization itself and take him to the village field where it is grown and teach him to the village field where it is grown and teach him to count the rounds he spins and the method of finding the evenness and strength of the yarn, you hold his interest and simultaneously train his eyes, hands and mind. I should give six months to this preliminary training. The child is now probably ready for learning how to read the alphabet and, when he is able to do so rapidly he is ready to learn simple drawing and when he has learnt to draw geometric figures and the figures of birds etc., he will draw not scrawl the figures of the alphabet. I consider writing as a fine art. We kill it by imposing the alphabet on little children and making it the beginning of learning."

So when I looked up and saw the child returning from grazing the cows, I wondered what she would have associated with it—different types of greenery, love towards animals, the food cycle, milk, dairy farming... or the young women emerging from the kitchen, what would they have learnt about fire, cooking, nourishment, nutrition, agriculture and the growth of rice and pulses. A new desire seemed to sprout in me. I wished I could go back in time and sit amidst nature to learn.

NAYI TALIM AS RESISTANCE

Nayi Talim was crafted in 1937 by Gandhiji, with a vision of resistance — both against the British model of schooling and against the larger colonial political-economic structures. Post-Independence, Vinoba Bhave took up the agenda of Nayi Talim as a vehicle for dissolving the model of governance in India. To this end, shiksha was to be geared around self-sufficiency (individual and socio-economic), dignity of labour, fearlessness and non-violence.

The crux of Nayi Talim lay in overcoming distinctions between learning and teaching, and between knowledge and work. In his work *Thoughts on Education*, Vinoba discussed the need to redefine the relationship between teacher and student, “they must each regard the other as a fellow worker...” As opposed to schooling, Nayi Talim was to give a secondary place to having individuals exclusively to ‘teach’ and to learning only from ‘textbooks’. Instead, the ‘teacher’ was to be skilled in a kala/hunar (and to derive sustenance from this and not a teaching salary). The student was to live, work and grow with the teacher and his/her family. In this process s/he would learn the kala/hunar — the skill as part of a way of life, code of ethics, and web of relationships.

However, the emphasis on craft has led to several misconceptions. Nayi Talim was not about merely giving children some handicraft to learn (as an extra-curricular activity), or learning a skill in exclusion of larger knowledge-sharing and thinking processes (vocalization). Rather, knowledge and work were to be seen

as an organic whole. Vinoba clarified, “The business of stitching a fragment of knowledge on to a fragment of work is not Nayi Talim.”

Vinoba suggested that each Gram Panchayat develop its own curricular content and children become acquainted with local geography and history. Ignoring this emphasis on contextual learning, a standardised project called ‘Basic Education’ was replicated by the Government throughout India. By binding this generative ‘seed-thought’ within the walls of rote learning, examinations and certification, India has achieved what Vinoba feared — the defining of Nayi Talim as a prescribed and stagnant model.

Also, Nayi Talim was misinterpreted as only being for the villages/villagers. Vinoba was emphatic that the ends of education cannot be met if ‘village children (are brought up to) serve the country while town children are brought up to loot their country!’ While, the learning processes in towns were to differ from those in villages, the ends were to remain consistent — reinforcing the interdependent and nurturing relationship between towns and villages.

Today, several groups around the country are trying to revive Nayi Talim. Unfortunately, their emphasis remains only on the ‘rural poor’, and on vocationalization for income generation. They fail to realize that unless the vision and practice of Nayi Talim is liberated from the Western technoeconomic paradigm of development, democracy, and progress, their efforts will remain sterile.

Source: Vimukt Shiksha – Resisting Schooling, June 2000, Issue 8

NEW HOPE

Sushma Sharma

In July 2005, Nayi Talim School was restarted at Sevagram in Wardha under the name Anand Niketan with the firm belief that Gandhiji's ideas on education are as relevant today as they were 75 years ago.

I am going to introduce you to a school that takes inspiration from Gandhi's ideas of education, which are called Nayi Talim. Nayi Talim believes in taking care of the head, the heart and the hands; and we believe this approach is still relevant. It is a holistic education of body, mind and spirit. This historical idea of education – which is not just a type of pedagogy but also a philosophy – was tried out on a large scale, in almost 50,000 schools in our country. After the Kothari Commission, we did not continue with it for various reasons.

Ananda Niketan runs in the same premises in which a historical experiment in education was inaugurated by Gandhi in 1937 and was later carried out by Ariyanayakam-ji and Asha Devi Ariyanayakam. The school closed down in 1974 and nothing happened till 2005. During 2003, we felt the need to look at Nayi Talim again – in today's context and eventually restarted Ananda Niketan.

Let me now come to the school that we run today. It is in Sevagram Ashram, in the same premises where the earlier experiment took place in 1937-1974. It is a small school with 165 children from pre-primary to Class 7 at the moment. The number of teachers is 18 including both full-time and part-time teachers. Students mainly come from lower socio-economic groups. Our children speak the local dialect which is a little different from the standard Marathi. Almost ten per cent of the students are from the border area and speak a dialect close to Hindi.

Productive work and work in social milieu makes up a major part of the curriculum. Then there are activities around self-governance. We do go into disciplinary learning of languages – Marathi, Hindi and English – Marathi being the language of instruction. In the earlier stages, the subjects are taught together – and the discourse bifurcation happens later.

Watching children at gardening could give you a glimpse of the amount of learning that might be taking place. For example, when they sow cotton – they need to know how parallel lines are drawn to mark the plots, how many seeds will be needed, how to use the ruler and weigh to measure the growth during the observation phase. Many times we feel that working with soil is something which children would not like. But while transplanting onions to the field, children get muddy – and they love it. Mushroom cultivation – a month-long project – helped them understand what is parasitic growth and other related concepts – and the 10 kg of mushrooms they grew were added to their *khichdi* as a bonus!



Nayi Talim

Whenever they have free time, they run to their plots and to see how the plants are growing. And mind you, all farming activities come from the curriculum – because in the 4th and 5th classes, they have farming and many concepts related to farming in the syllabus. So we take this as a craft.

It is a challenge to sustain an educational system which has no government sanction. If you ask whether children are rushing

towards our school, the answer is no. But the ones who have come have stayed. I see that from the four children we had in the first year and the six in the second, we now have ten children and will have 17 next year. We cannot have more than 25 children per class in any case due to the size of our rooms and the kind of activities we do. And that's the advisable group I feel – for elementary education. Our school is seeing a natural growth, this is just the beginning.

Excerpts from an edited transcript of the presentation given by Sushma Sharma, Director, Anand Niketan in Bangalore in February, 2014

Reading is basic to democracy

Krishna Kumar

The teaching of reading during early childhood — when attitudes, habits and skills acquire life-long foundations — assumes crucial significance for the efficient functioning of democracy.

Literacy is the foundation of school education but in our country the term 'literacy' is used almost exclusively in the context of adults. This is not surprising, given the embarrassingly large share of India in the global count of adults who can neither read nor write. Why India's share has not dwindled significantly is partly related to the fact that the years spent by children in primary schools do not necessarily make them literate. Many who acquire a tenuous grip on literacy during those years fail to retain it in the absence of opportunities to read, compounded by dropping out of school before completing the upper primary classes. Even in the case of those who acquire lasting literacy, schooling fails to impart the urge to read as a matter of habit. Those who learn to perceive reading as a means to expand knowledge and awareness are a minority. Sensational surveys of children's poor performance in reading tests throw little light on the deeper problems that the teaching of reading in India suffers from. If these problems are not addressed in an institutionalised manner, the newly enacted law on the right to education will remain ineffective.

The ability to decipher isolated letters of the alphabet is not a promising beginning in the child's progress towards becoming literate. However, this is precisely what conventional wisdom tells teachers to focus on. The wisdom is based on millennia-old practices which enabled a few children

to become literate. When we apply this wisdom today, we forget that the method worked in a socio-cultural context which was altogether different from our context now. When literacy was confined to a thin upper stratum of society, the teacher demanded from his wards a mastery over letters and sounds for its own sake. It took years to acquire such mastery, and the methods used to ensure it included oppressive drills and a punitive regime that can have no place today. When people feel nostalgic about traditional education, they forget that it was based on a view of childhood few would approve today. Moreover, the traditional system had no intention to cover all children. The methods it used for the teaching of reading are unsuitable for a universal system of education. The traditional approach does not recognise the child's nature and agency, nor does it respect individual differences.

New approach

The traditional methods are incompatible with the modern psychology of childhood and the knowledge available today on the acquisition of language-related skills. Contemporary expertise is based on the premise that children have a natural drive to explore and understand the world; hence, reading should give them the opportunity to make sense of printed texts from the beginning. 'Making sense' as an experience involves relating to the text, generating a personal engagement and interpretation. If children are not encouraged to relate to the text, or if the text they are given has little meaning or relevance, the outcome will be a crude kind of literacy, which will remain isolated from their intellectual and emotional development. If this wider

Reading is basic to democracy

meaning of reading is applied to make an assessment, our system of primary education will arouse far greater concern than children's test scores in achievement surveys do. Persistent effort under the pressure to perform does make children capable of reading aloud a written text, but they fail to find any meaning in it. And the ability to decipher a text mechanically does not encourage children to actively look for new texts to read. The anecdote narrated by ChinnaChacko, a former member of the NCERT, in a paper she presented at the International Reading Association in 1971 continues to hold true. When she asked a child to read aloud, he asked: "With the text or without the text?" Reflecting on the methods used in Indian schools for teaching children how to read, ChinnaChacko wrote: "Many things are done the same way they have been done for centuries and, as a result, our primary teacher-training schools and primary schools are like museums in which old ways are carefully preserved."

The cost of this museum-mentality is high, if we take into account the role that a reading public plays in a democratic order. The practice of democracy assumes both the habit and the capacity in all citizens to engage with matters which transcend personal or immediate reality. We can call it the metaphysics of daily life under modernity. It compels every member — without exception — to share a collective anguish and to respond to it in one way or another. Engagement with this expanded universe cannot be sustained without the tools of literacy, in addition to — and not as a substitute of — the oral means of interaction. In this model, reading serves as more than a skill; it becomes an aspect of culture. It must enable citizens to reflect on what is going on, not merely a skill to decipher printed texts. From this larger perspective, the teaching of reading during early childhood — when attitudes, habits

and skills acquire life-long foundations — acquires crucial significance for the efficient functioning of democracy. This perspective implies drastic changes in the currently practised pedagogy of reading in pre-schools and the primary classes. Instead of letter-recognition and mechanical decoding, pedagogic effort must focus on building bridges between words and meanings, and on nurturing an interpretive stance from the earliest stage. This kind of pedagogy requires meaningful texts and a sustained use of children's literature. The texts used for the teaching of reading should treat the child with dignity, showing respect for the child's inner drive to interpret and relate. The sociology of the text content is equally important. We need texts that make children excited about the social and cultural diversity that they encounter in their ethos. We also need kind and affectionate teachers who are themselves habitual readers and can encourage each child to perceive reading as a means to pursue his or her own interest.

NCERT's role

Barkha, a 40-part series of books for beginner readers, prepared under a special project of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, published by the NCERT, successfully responds to these various expectations. The books of this series mark several innovations, including those in design and illustration, and not just in the conception of child-centred narratives. In place of the usual patronising attitude towards children that we see in educational literature, the Barkha books present real children, doing the kinds of things ordinary children do at home and in the neighbourhood. A radical attempt has been made in these books not just to move away from stereotypes, but to challenge them. It is the first time in India that a graded reading series, with a literary approach to reading, has been introduced. The early

literacy department of the NCERT, which created this series, has been working with several State governments, encouraging them to develop similar material in their languages and to train teachers to adopt the imaginative approach to reading what Barkha represents.

Strangely enough, the NCERT has decided to close down the department that was promoting this approach. This is not the first time in India that a distinct attempt to focus on reading and libraries has been prematurely abandoned. Institutional vicissitudes are much too common to require comment. One can only hope that the Ministry of Human Resource Development, which controls the NCERT, will review this decision and

restore early literacy's academic identity. Strong institutional leadership is required to motivate State governments, NGOs and private publishers to take children's literature, especially its neglected aspects like design and illustration, seriously. After decades of advocacy for gender-sensitive material for children, the larger scenario remains quite alarming. Many NGOs have now taken to publishing for children, and in the absence of expert guidance and institutionalised review processes, they are churning out poor quality material, often with explicit ideological bias. State governments purchase such material with the copious funds that the SSA provides for classroom libraries. The NCERT does need to play a leadership role in this anarchic scene.

Reggio Emilia Philosophy

The Child is Made of One Hundred

*The child has a hundred languages
A hundred hands
A hundred thoughts
A hundred ways of thinking
Of playing, of speaking
A hundred always a hundred
Ways of listening
Of marvelling of loving*

*A hundred joys
For singing and understanding
A hundred worlds
To discover a hundred worlds
To invent a hundred worlds*

*To dream the child has a hundred languages
And a hundred hundred hundred more
But they steal ninety nine.
The school and the culture
Separate the head from the body.*

*They tell the child:
To think without hands
To do without head
To listen and not to speak
To understand without joy
To love and to marvel
Only at Easter and Christmas*

*They tell the child:
To discover the world already there
And of the hundred they steal ninety nine.*

*They tell the child:
That work and play
Reality and fantasy
Science and imagination
Sky and earth
Reason and dream
Are things that do not belong together.*

*And thus they tell the child
That the hundred is not there.
The child says:
No way. The hundred is there.*

Loris Malaguzzi

The Reggio approach to learning is child-centred, teacher-facilitated, and community-based work-in-progress. It shines as a beacon in the education world on how best to draw from intrinsic faculties and extrinsic resources to cater to needs of children, while fulfilling their socio-emotional requirements.



Reggio Emilia is a city in Northern Italy which is world famous for the Reggio Emilia Approach—an educational philosophy practised in 33 of its Municipal Infant-Toddler Centres (0-3 years) and Preschools (3-5+ years). It was developed by a teacher Loris Malaguzzi, and the parents of villages in the vicinity after World War II. After such a massively destructive event, people believed that children were in need of a new way of learning: the assumption was that every person forms her/his own personality during early years of development. The mantra then is to foster education that promotes the best

possible integration among children's languages which, as Malaguzzi said, are a hundred or more.

Since these schools came after the repercussions of Fascism, people had learnt the danger of obeying everything and conforming to everyone. Children had to act and think for themselves. Thus it was important that they learnt ethics.

yet gone beyond all and made its own theories as well.

The child is viewed as an active constructor of knowledge rather than a mere target of instruction. Loris Malaguzzi believed that for children knowledge proceeds like a 'tangle of spaghetti'. It advances – retreats – stands still – takes many directions. Reggio schools do not have



The Hundred Languages Exhibit

Commendably, the Reggio approach has been able to involve children, parents and politicians in one web of participatory engagement.

Reggio's success to a great extent is owed to the incorporated elements of the philosophies of Piaget (teacher and child are co-constructors of knowledge), Vygotsky (teacher provides experiences that are in the zone of proximal development of the child, thereby enhancing learning), Montessori (play has a significant role in learning) and John Dewey (learning is an active exchange, not a passive transmission),

curriculum/lesson plans/units as those lead to 'teaching' rather than 'learning'. They also do not have textbooks for which the ultimate beneficiary is the publisher and distributor. Instead, every year the school delineates a series of projects – some short ranges, some long range, depending upon the learning style of students and teachers. The teachers follow the children, not lesson plans. Reggio's education is like a rhizome – many headed and many directional. In Reggio's projects, the child is in the focus and the topic is around him, thereby giving rise to a self-guided curriculum.

Reggio Emilia Philosophy

Reggio schools are modelled along the lines of extended families. Each class of approx 25 children spends 3 years with the same teacher, thereby experiencing long and stable associations. The buildings are like large homes with a piazza. The ambience is warm and cheerful. Children are free to work and play without frequent interruptions—sans rigid time tables. Children use a lot of visual media, graphic language and design to represent ideas. Comments given by educators on students' work are devoid of judgement—good or bad. Educators experience that when adults communicate genuine and serious interest in a child's ideas and their expressions, s/he organically improves.

Ateliers are the most unique components of the Reggio approach. An atelier is a studio or laboratory: "a space for researching motivations and theories of children from scribbles on up, a place for exploring variations in tools, techniques and materials with which to work." Ateliers are the areas where children do what they want to create, draw, paint, sculpt, dirty their hands, etc., extensively used for child's extended play or project work. Today most Reggio schools have mini-ateliers next to each classroom.

Carlina Rinaldi, the current Pedagogista cum Director, believes that Why? How? What? are the questions that children constantly ask themselves, both in school and outside of school. We don't have to teach them to ask "why?" because inside each human being is the need to understand the reasons, the meaning of the world around us and the meaning of our life. With this attitude, the child

remains a real researcher. Teachers are to support and sustain this attitude of children to construct explanations. If a child says, "It's raining because God is crying," we could easily destroy his theory by telling him that it's because of the clouds. The need is to cultivate the child's intention to research and encourage him to make theories as explanations. To marry theory with practice, Rinaldi thinks that documentation is very important as it enables teachers to map the children's learning. Observation charts, written notes and diaries, video recordings, photographs – all help in re-interpreting child's learning curve. Lots of proofs of children's learning are mounted every day on the wall panels.

Yet another unique aspect is 'The Hundred Languages Exhibit' which has been on display since 1987 till date! It was conceived and curated by Malaguzzi and Rinaldi to showcase the educational story of Reggio that weaves together the experiences, reflections, debates of generations of its children and their parents. This exhibit is taken for meetings, conferences and workshops to spread Reggio's approach. The exhibit is never final. It remains work in progress as it keeps getting edited with new additions all the time.

Reggio educators believe that theirs is not a model, a programme, a best practice or a benchmark. It is not an exportable product. Other cultures are studying it and localizing it. The main thing is to find out – what works! Outside Europe, it is also being experimented with in Australia, US and South Korea.

A Unique Adventure in Rural Science Teaching

In the seventies, two voluntary agencies—Friends Rural Centre and Kishore Bharati—had conducted what may be called a pioneering experiment in science education in village schools. The experiment involved the teachers and children of 16 village schools of Hoshangabad district in Madhya Pradesh, and the emphasis was on 'learning by discovery'. But it was soon discovered, the phrase can remain a seminar cliché, unless educational innovations take the socio-economic factors into account.

It was examination time. Bhaiyalal sat memorising hard. The topic was, 'Preparation of Oxygen.' Parrot-like he repeated. 'One by heating glass. Two by heating potassium permanganate. Three by heating...' The possibility of glass releasing oxygen was something new for us. The boy insisted, 'Guruji told us that glass, when heated, gave off oxygen.' We were puzzled. Going through his textbook, the mystery was solved. It said that oxygen can be prepared by heating the oxide of lead ('seesa' in Hindi). The teacher applied his ingenuity to interpret 'seesa' as 'sheesha' (meaning glass). From 'sheesha' to 'kanch' (glass) was the next step. The 'oxide' fell on the wayside.

Some children sat drawing circles of different diameters with the help of their compasses. The teacher had trained them well. A casual question was posed by one of us, 'Can you draw a circle of 4-feet diameter?' The whole class looked dumbfounded. The school had taught them to draw circles using only a compass. A compass had its limits. 'If you had to dig a well, 4-feet in diameter, how would you begin?' we prompted. The young faces lit up, 'That's easy – using a peg and a string!' They confidently sat about demonstrating their skill.

The incidents described above illustrate a serious malady in the teaching of science in rural schools. (Urban schools fare, perhaps,

just a bit better!) In our perspective of rural development, a wide ranging attack on such significant gaps between expectations and reality in education occupies a prominent place. Why does a child have to memorise a whole range of disconnected and irrelevant facts in the name of science? These facts often make little sense to the teachers themselves and are seldom remembered beyond the examination.

We are faced with some stark facts. First, knowledge is growing exponentially. No one is expected to know or retain any significant fraction of it. Secondly, it is generally accepted that 60 to 70 per cent of village children either do not enter the school system or drop out at an early age. A mere one-fifth enter high school in rural areas. Our present education is mainly designed for those privileged few. This, to us, was a contradiction. The focus of education, we felt, should be to prepare the vast majority which drops out midway for facing the tough school of earning a livelihood. Education's objectives, thus, need to be re-defined in this perspective. Science education must aim at developing skills and attitudes which enable students to learn directly from their environment and experiences.

Such ideas were concretised in a proposal we presented to the Director of Public Instruction at Bhopal in February 1972. We were apprehensive. We had no

A Unique Adventure in Rural Science Teaching

locus standi in the field of school education. We intended to test the feasibility of the discovery approach in learning all the science subjects under village conditions. In addition, our proposal stated that traditional barriers of syllabus, teaching methods, textbooks, teacher student relationships and school administration would emerge from the day-to-day experiences of the teachers and children, not from the scholarly expectations of city based experts. The examination system would also have to undergo a radical change in keeping with the new objectives. We sought freedom to do that. The State Government gave us permission. And, thus, the experiment began.

Encounters with Teachers

The morning of 25 May 1972 saw an unsure faculty facing an apprehensive group of 34 teachers. The first Orientation Course for teachers had begun. There was no inauguration, no fanfare. Of the participants, only four or five were graduates, one in science. The rest had studied only up to high school and had little or no science background. The ice was broken by a question, “What do you find lacking in the present education system?” A lively dialogue was sparked off. It soon petered out into an uneasy silence with the arrival of the District Education Officer (DEO). Despite our appeal and the DEO’s encouragement, the openness of the earlier discussion could not be re-established. That was our first taste of the hierarchical structure of the Education Department, which stifles communications and feedback from the grassroots to the planners.

Only a year later, however, the same teachers took the visit of the State Education Minister in their stride. His arrival caused only a minor flutter. The teachers continued to perform the experiments even when the

Minister stopped at their tables to observe them. Today these teachers can participate in uninhibited discussions with senior administrators, educationists, scientists and NCERT representatives.

When teachers were reluctant to try out new experiments which appeared too simple, Prof. Yash Pal’s “*Yar, karke to dekho*” with a friendly pat on the back made all the difference. Throughout the 21-day course, the teachers had free access to kit materials and books. For the first time in their experience of such courses (some had been through many), they were actually doing experiments. They were perplexed that these experiments could be performed with simple items like thread, balloons, rubber bands, paper clips, buttons and *kulhads* (earthen cups). The basic issues of the discovery approach soon began surfacing.

For example, a teacher-farmer raised a question, “How do fertilizers in soil reach the leaves?” At once, an experiment was planned. A twig was cut and placed in red ink solution. Half an hour later, the leaf veins turned red. The conclusion was obvious. But one teacher was sceptical, “How can we be sure? Perhaps the veins turned red because we cut the twig. I have seen apples turn brown after cutting.” Although the question appeared trivial to us, it could not be ignored. Such questions form the backbone of the discovery approach, providing links for further experimentation. A heated debate followed. It was decided to modify the experiment by including a second twig placed in plain water. The concept of using ‘controls’ was born.

The teachers were by now thoroughly engrossed in the spirit of enquiry. “What would happen if we used blue ink?” asked one. All faces turned to the faculty biologist. He shrugged, “I do not know.”

The teachers were flabbergasted. “How did you get your Ph.D if you do not know such simple things?” It was a jolt to their value system. To them a Ph.D signified the end-point of all knowledge. Here was a chance to illustrate the open-endedness of scientific enquiry. They began to realise that they too, would often be forced into such tight spots when they would have to admit, “I do not know the answer. Let us find out.” It was a negation of the traditional pre-eminence of the teacher. It had been along battle. The “I do not know” philosophy is only now slowly sinking in.

Even simple exercises, for instance, of measuring lengths, had many surprises in store for us. Everyone was asked to measure the length of the blackboard: 200.8 cm, 198.7 cm, 200.5 cm, 199.2 cm... ran the list. Why this variation? Maybe they had made mistakes. They measured again, more cautiously. They were visibly disturbed by the persistence of variation. For them the sanctity of science lay in its exactness. The weighing and measurements of shopkeepers, too, showed such variations, but they put that down to cheating. A cosmic ray physicist came forward to relate his experience of similar variations in cosmic ray measurements, even with ‘phoren’ equipment. That day a new word ‘ghat-badh’, literally decrease-increase, was added to their scientific vocabulary.

The programme goes to schools

The teachers at once put their training to practice in their schools. Children were split into groups of four to five to do experiments. Later on, *Paribhraman* (field trips) was introduced as an integral part of the curriculum. Special emphasis was placed on the role of follow-up visits by faculty members to the classrooms—

not for inspection but for assistance, assessment and collection of feedback. Sitting with the children on the floor, we would go through their workbooks, assist in experiments, jot down our observations and collect criticism and suggestions from them.

Intensive school visits and teachers’ monthly meetings soon destroyed many of our romantic notions. We often found the sixth, seventh and eighth class in one room, with the primary classes on the veranda religiously chanting their lessons. Sometimes, a single teacher would handle more than one class at a time. ‘No-classes’ was a frequent phenomenon. Kit material was often left unclean and flung in disarray. Advance preparations for the day’s experiments were uncommon. The kit was misused. Plastic buckets, scissors, blades, and threads found their way to private homes. Influential village leaders took the liberty of calling for plastic dishes, mugs, and tumblers for their wedding feasts. Sometimes these never came back. Interesting items like magnets, torch, bulbs and lenses were irresistible to the children and were promptly pinched.

We had not expected very high academic standards, but what startled us most was the rock-bottom level of children’s development. Minimum capabilities of written expression, comprehension and mathematics, which they should have acquired in primary school, were glaringly missing. Children could not even write in simple Hindi an event, which they had observed. Elementary instructions in the workbook were not comprehended. The few who could read failed to link instructions to actions. They had been trained only to memorise. Primary numeracy skills were not fully developed. A child who could count up to 500 when asked to write 501 was flummoxed. All this adversely affected

A Unique Adventure in Rural Science Teaching

the children's capability to do and discuss science experiments.

The teacher too, had their problems. Harassment, transfers, attachments, administrative and survey work, low salaries, bossism of local politicians are only some of the factors which take a teacher's mind off teaching. The teaching profession has lost its legendary prestige. The discovery approach has failed to make any dent in these structural barriers. Unmotivated teachers remain uninspired. There silver lining was that about half the teachers, who already had a high level of motivation, exploited the avenues opened up by the discovery approach. This, and the unbounded enthusiasm of the children, provided the rationale for such innovative efforts.

In several instances, children and teachers gathered after class hours to observe the night skies. There were teachers who could inspire children to take complete responsibility for the management of the kit. Children organised themselves to continue experiments during the teacher's absence. Some children even went beyond class experiments by designing their own little gadgets like projectors, electric motors and bells, torches and musical toys from whatever materials they could lay their hands on. Diving into rivers, plodding through mud, climbing trees and daringly probing burrows during field trips, children had come back with rare specimens of animals, plants, rocks, insects, eggs and nests. In our experience, a crucial factor in the proper working of any school was the concern shown by the village people.

Thorns and Test Tubes – The Kit

'We are a poor nation; we cannot supply kits for experiments. The discovery approach is a luxury only affluent nations

can afford.' How often such apologies are heard. These derive from the myth that science experiments can be done only with fancy glassware, costly chemicals and sophisticated physical apparatus. Our experience was totally to the contrary. The use of sophisticated equipment is not merely unnecessary but, in some cases, actually undesirable. It aids in the mystification of science, removing it farther from the day-to-day realities of life.

The 'Braintrust'

It has been a standing joke with us that during annual evaluations and orientation courses, a stone thrown in any direction would strike a Ph.D or a Ph.D-to-be. For, this is the time when our Resource Group members from AISTA, Delhi University, TIFR, IIT's, postgraduate colleges of Madhya Pradesh and other places converge on Rasulia and Bankhedi. Intense discussions carry on deep into the night and often spill over to the Delhi University Coffee House and TIFR West Canteen where remote villages like Dolariya, Junetha, Chandon and Nimsadiya acquire a real meaning.

The participation of the Delhi University Group in the programme got official sanction from the University Grants Commission and the University Authorities in 1973. It was the first time that a university group in the country was officially involved in improving school education. Faculty members spent a semester each at the field level. This close involvement has helped to 'conscientise' the university group about grassroots level contradictions and conditions. These have been important landmarks in the nation-wide debate on the social objectives of higher education. Education at the university level itself

needs drastic changes, but such changes cannot precede, and certainly cannot be unrelated to, reform at the school level. In fact, meaningful reform at the school level will almost inevitably force reform at the universities. However, unless there is an official reorientation of the values of promotion of incentives, the vast potential in the nation's university system will remain untapped for the task of educational change.

The Hoshangabad experiment, we believe, has succeeded in bringing the concept of learning through the environment-based discovery approach from the level of a seminar cliché down to the plane of reality in village schools. The future success of the endeavour depends upon the political will of the Government and commitment from the academic community to better education in the schools of India's villages.

[Excerpts from a feature in Science Today, December 1977]

The Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme (HSTP) was initiated in rural middle schools (classes 6 to 8) of Madhya Pradesh in 1972 as a response to the dismal state of teaching of science in the country. Those days NCERT's major concern was the exponential growth in scientific knowledge and its incorporation in school science books. The way of keeping pace with this was by 'raising standards' of the science books, which merely meant stuffing more content and pushing difficult concepts down to lower classes. This was in the belief that if children are 'exposed' to them early they will pick them up faster eventually. HSTP was envisaged as a small beginning to counter this. It was based on the principle of learning science through experiments. Given the rural setting, learning from the environment also became a core principle. It was a major curricular and pedagogic breakthrough in a stagnant and hierarchical government school system. A series of text-cum-workbooks with detailed guidelines for this education model evolved during the project, which today is available at Eklavya, Bhopal.

Learning to Say No to a System That Fails

Arti Jaiman

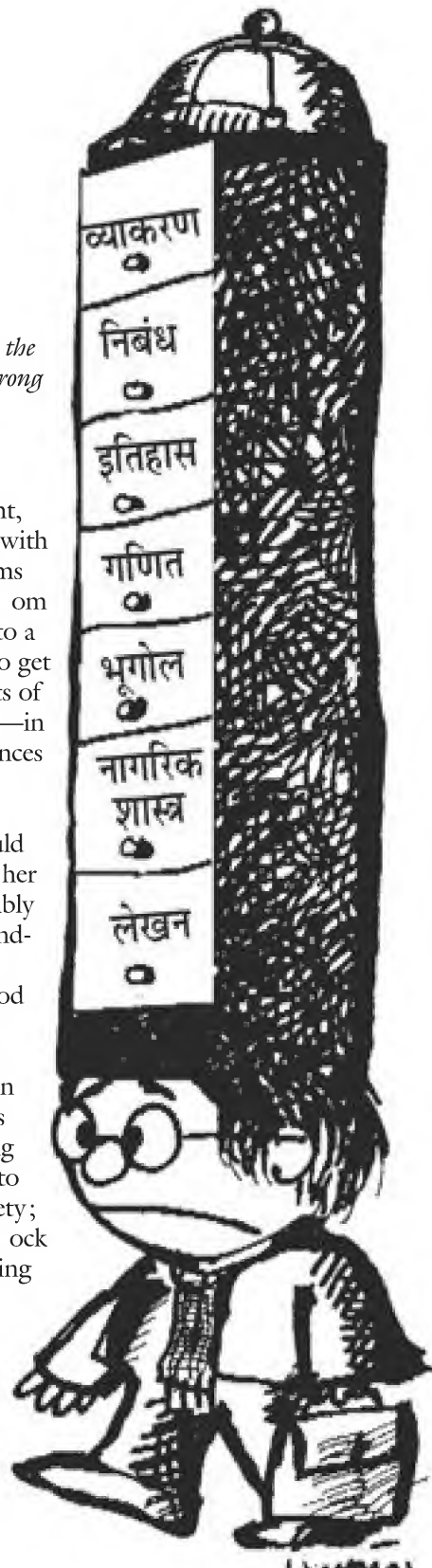
Children spend long hours in schools without even learning the basics. Many parents have felt there was something seriously wrong with schools but could never pinpoint the 'crimes' which schools constantly perpetuate. Danger: School! does that.

Recently a worried relative called up. Their bright, school-going daughter was having trouble coping with her studies. She just could not memorise the poems that were part of her school syllabus. A stern missive from school sent the desperate parents scampering for help—to a tutor. Three and a half years old, their daughter is about to get her first taste of failure at learning. Learning that consists of little more than regurgitating meaningless Nursery rhymes—in English—that have little reference to her everyday experiences in her largely Hindi-speaking home.

Ensnared in our plush 'English-medium' life, one could well ask, if the child is comfortable in Hindi, why send her to an English-medium school? Her parents would, probably justifiably, retaliate, "And condemn her to a life as a second-grade citizen, who will constantly have to live with the knowledge that by not knowing English, she just isn't good enough!"

In a time driven by the market, and in a market driven by suave, English-speaking power-brokers, our schools have yet to outgrow their original function as processing houses meant to turn inquisitive, ingenious children into unquestioning 'productive' members of an industrial society; 'good citizens' who are constantly being warned not to rock the boat, or question the status-quo and the ever increasing dominance of market values in our lives.

The 'resurrection' of the world's most subversive cartoon book on education titled *Danger: School!* more than 20 years after it was first published in Geneva by the radical Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and his team members at IDAC, brings to us a must-read that grabs us by the throat and thrusts the reality of our schools into our disbelieving faces. The book is a product of intense debate that took Europe and North America by



storm in the 60's and 70's when nearly every institution, from the school to the state was scrutinised by questioning minds like Ivan Illich, John Holt, Paulo Freire and many others. Though based on examples taken from the Western European context, the scenarios depicted are uncannily universal.

So much of the book reflects our own school days which are shrouded in nostalgia, blocking out recurring moments of fear, oppression and loneliness. Big punishments for small 'crimes'. One forgot a notebook, and a teacher taunted 'Did you forget to eat your breakfast, wear your clothes, your shoes...then how dare you forget to bring your book.' A meaningless argument meant only to make a child cower with fear. For fear meant respect. Or so they thought. And if the hierarchy of teacher and student were not enough, the setting up of other hierarchies, all based on the power of 'discipline', of fear. Monitors

to check uniforms and prefects to dole out punishments. A process of manpower management that would appear to draw its inspiration from the management of inmates of a prison - appoint some 'stooges' from within the prisoners, and set them free to inflict a reign of terror on the rest of the prisoners.

Even if one does come out relatively unscathed from this 12-year process of socialisation, our schools have systematically transformed learning from an exciting and active accumulation of experiences, to a tedious and passive process in which the student is just little more than a recipient of second-hand 'knowledge', a process that completely bypasses the experiences that the students bring to the classroom.

The story of how *Danger: School!* came on Indian shelves is as interesting as the



Learning to Say No to a System That Fails

book itself. The book (Geneva version) was discovered in Kishore Bharati library in Hoshangabad in the '70s by independent science educator Arvind Gupta and its photocopied versions were circulated to friends for years.

He finally came to the conclusion that the book needed to be put into wider circulation and got in touch with the publishers IDAC (Institute for Cultural Action, Geneva). To his aid came Sujit Patwardhan who owns the Mudra press in Pune. He offered to print the minimum print run of 1,000 copies at a cost of Rs 15 per copy, the lowest he could quote, considering that binding itself cost Rs 2. With Rs. 15,000 to raise, Gupta persuaded nine like-minded friends to invest in this venture. The method was simple. Each person, including Gupta himself, would invest Rs. 1500. Once the 1000 copies were printed, each 'investor' would receive 100 copies of the book—their share—to distribute as they pleased.

Around this time, patrons of *Danger: School!* felt a strong need to translate it into Hindi to expand its reach. *Chakmak*, a magazine for children published by Bhopal-based NGO Eklavya stepped up to the cause and featured part-by-part translation of the book in its 13 issues. During the process of translation under the guidance of Vinod Raina, Indian nuances and context automatically slipped into its pages. The articles were widely appreciated by the readers, to the extent that Lucknow-based Prashant Kumar expressed the wish to print a collated version of the translations in his publication *Samkalin Dastavez* in 1991. Thus emerged *Khatra : School!* which has since 1999 been published by Bharat Gyan

Vigyan Samiti. It has also been translated into Marathi and Telegu.

Thereafter came the 180° turnabout moment when Claude Alvarès of Other India Book Press, Goa, which has brought to life many other priceless books, expressed its interest to reconvert *Khatra : School!* from Hindi to English! The first Indianised edition of *Danger: School!* appeared in 1996 and was reprinted in 2007 in collaboration with Earthcare Books, Kolkata. The reprint of *Danger: School!*, a pioneering attempt at reaching out, could rekindle the dormant discussion on the direction in which schooling in India is headed, as competitive fervour seems to be submerging even the much vaunted alternative modes like Montessori, Summerhill and Krishnamurty. The printing trajectory of this book is a fine example of how a group of people can bypass the obstacle course set up by the book publishing mafia.

If *Danger: School!* ever goes beyond the limited readership it presently enjoys, it will probably happen because of the concerted efforts of people like Gupta and his like-minded friends who pursue their work with the premise that a good idea only gets better when it is spread around. Through endless photocopying, begging, pleading, even demanding reprinting rights, and in extreme cases, even pirating a book if necessary, translating classics on education into other Indian languages, constantly cajoling (sometimes, successfully) organisations like the National Book Trust and the Department of Science and Technology to print these books, and writing for whichever science magazine they can lay their hands on, Gupta and his friends are constantly reaching out to students, parents, and educators.

Based on an article that appeared in the Economic Times on 6 October 1996

Maths Visionary: P. K. Srinivasan

Arvind Gupta

Skills are Taught

Concepts are Caught - PKS

“From the near to the far, from the concrete to the abstract,” is a sound pedagogic approach for learning maths. Before children can understand a thing, they need experience: seeing, touching, hearing, tasting, smelling; choosing, arranging, putting things together, taking things apart. They need to experiment with real things. This is how it’s done in Hungary – a small country which has produced some of the world’s greatest mathematicians.

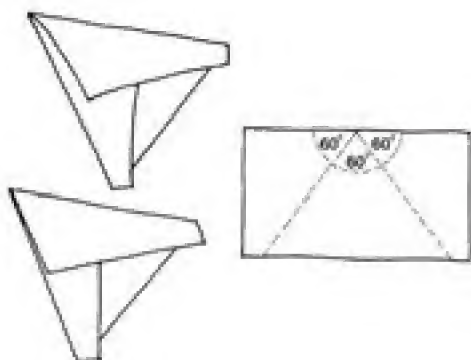
The greatest proponent in India of learning maths through activities was P. K. Srinivasan (PKS). As a one man maths missionary he did more than anyone else to imbue children with the love for this most beautiful subject mathematics – the queen of all sciences.

This article is both a tribute as well as a recapitulation of some of PKS’s work.

PKS breathed maths. He dreamt maths. More than anything else he rubbed this infectious enthusiasm on anyone who crossed his path. I first met him in 1986

in a workshop organized by the NCERT at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. Those were pre-xerox days so PKS summoned a ream of cyclostyling paper, scissors, glue, old newspapers and one lone stapler. PKS gave each teacher one sheet of paper and asked them to fold an angle of sixty degrees? The teachers were at sea! Schooled into drawing angles only with a protractor they didn’t know any other way of doing it. After 15-minutes of struggle the teachers gave up. Then PKS folded one straight edge (180-degrees) into 3 equal parts and produced an exact 60-degree angle! The teachers were amazed. It was almost like a revelation – all so elegant and beautiful. He showed them half a dozen different ways of folding 60-degrees. For instance, fold a strip into three equal parts and then into a triangle. All angles of this equilateral triangle would certainly be 60-degrees.

The whole day the teachers folded geometric shapes – a rhombus, a hexagon, an octagon etc. But how do you fold a pentagon? Paper folding by its very nature is binary. As you keep folding and doubling paper you generate 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64 ... layers. Weren’t these all binary numbers? But how does one fold a pentagon? It is tricky but easy. In 1883, an Indian mathematician T. Sundara Rao (Rao Anglicized to Rao) had shown this in his book *Some Geometric Exercises in Paper Folding* (still in print by Dover and perhaps the world’s first ever book on Origami and Mathematics). How? Cut a long 3-cm wide strip from an A-4 size paper and simply tie a knot! Flatten the knot the trim the long ends to get a regular



Maths Visionary: P. K. Srinivasan



pentagon. How many times have we tied knots and never noticed this!

In this workshop the teachers folded over 80 shapes, some 2-D and others 3-D. All the 2-D shapes were stuck in an improvised file made by stapling a newspaper! They even folded a protractor with a dozen angles from a square of paper. The teachers were overjoyed. Perhaps they learned more practical geometry in these 2-days than they had done in their 2-year BEd course!

This brings us to the moot point – how out of sync is school maths with the real world. Early mathematics evolved from the work of the tailor and the tinker – all practical crafts people. Mathematics has deep roots in practice. The very vocabulary of mathematics is replete with associations of its pragmatic past. Consider for instance, the word “straight line”. It comes from the Latin word “Stretched Linen”. As any farmer wanting to grow potatoes would simply stretch a string to help him sow his crop in a straight line. Any mason would simply stretch a piece of string to help him lay bricks in a straight line. So, over time “Stretched Linen” became “Straight Line”. The “digits” 1 to 10, which we use so commonly come from the Latin word for fingers – the ten little fingers of our hands.

Today school mathematics is totally cut off from real life. The entire curriculum seems to be overlaid by the mumbo-jumbo of professional mathematicians. In the process the entire beauty and joy of mathematics has got buried. The horrendous way mathematics is taught in

schools it gives children a life time’s distaste for this wonderful subject. If children are to appreciate the beauty of mathematics, it is imperative for children to get a “feel” for mathematics through practical work.

PKS struggled to infuse life in mathematics. He cried, he wept and pleaded with one and all that mathematics was all around them. And when no one listened he wrote a series of 60 odd articles for the Hindu which have become classic. He demonstrated that there was mathematics in coins, in broomsticks, in matchboxes, in the square copy, in bus tickets, in the calendar in every ordinary thing around us.

After considerable struggle these articles were collated by the NCERT into a book *Resource Material for Mathematics Club Activities*. This splendid book – perhaps the greatest maths activity book ever to be produced in India has just been reprinted by the NCERT after being out of print for almost a decade.

PKS was not always so lucky. In the seventies he wrote two amazing books *Number fun with the Calendar* and *Romping in Numberland*. He ran from pillar to post, from one publisher to another without any success. Publishers wanted him to write a high-school maths guide which was directly linked to the school mass market. PKS refused. Often his biggest enemies were his fellow teachers. They hated his popularity with students. Some of them even connived and had him beaten up!

But his students loved him. Some of them never forgot the inspiring way

PKS taught them mathematics. In the mid-eighties, fifteen years after these two books *Number fun with the Calendar* and *Romping in Numberland* were written they were published by PKS's ex-student who made good money in an ice cream business in Chennai! This certainly was a good way of paying *gurudakshina*. Alas, despite the plethora of government organizations and private do-gooders there are still no takers of good books in our country!

PKS shared his passions liberally. In the early nineties he sent me a Xerox copy of the masterpiece *1001 uses of the 100 squares* – by Leah Mildred Beardsley. This landmark book showed possibilities of doing amazingly creative maths activities by using just a square copy – used by children to do their arithmetic sums and available even in far flung villages. This book was a revelation.

All his life PKS shunned commercial gains. He generously gave his book *Manual for Mathematics Teaching Aids in the Primary School* to the NCERT for free, without any royalties. This gem is out of print for years and needs to be translated into all Indian languages. He was always clad in a white *kurta* and *dhoti* spun out of *khadi* – rough and homespun cotton which symbolized Gandhiji's concept of *Swadeshi*. He always sported a Gandhi cap as well. His passion for mathematics was visible as one approached his house in Chennai. The compound gate, walls and grills were laden with equations, identities and proofs-by-sight. This legendary maths teacher passed away in 2005 at the age of 81.

The greatest tribute to PKS will be to translate all his popular books into all languages; to digitize and upload them for the children of the world. There can be no better tribute to this Pied Piper of Maths.

Download links for the aforementioned books:

Resource Material for Mathematics Club Activities

www.arrindguptatoys.com/arrindgupta/maths-club-activities.pdf

Number fun with the Calendar

www.arrindguptatoys.com/arrindgupta/calendar-1.pdf

<http://gyanpedia.in/Portals/0/Toys%20from%20Trash/Resources/books/calendar.pdf>

Romping in Numberland

www.arrindguptatoys.com/arrindgupta/rompinginnumberlandeng.pdf

1001 uses of the 100 squares

www.arrindguptatoys.com/arrindgupta/squaresall.pdf

Manual for Mathematics Teaching Aids in the Primary School

www.arrindguptatoys.com/arrindgupta/pks-primarymanual.pdf

Primary Maths – How do they do it in Hungary?

<http://www.teachers.tv/video/17878>

<https://vimeo.com/5321478>

El Sistema

El Sistema

An orchestra is a community where the essential and exclusive feature is that it comes together with the fundamental objective of agreeing with itself. Agree on what? To create beauty! Therefore the person who plays in an orchestra begins to live the experience of agreement. And what does the experience of agreement mean? Team practice – the practice of the group that recognizes itself as interdependent, where everyone is responsible for others and the others are responsible for oneself

~ José Antonio Abreu, the founder of El Sistema

El Sistema (Spanish for ‘the system’) is a publicly financed voluntary sector music education programme that completes 40 years of its formation in Venezuela this year. Since its founding in 1975, El Sistema has employed music education as a vehicle for social change to emerge as the most famous music education programme in the world. El Sistema-inspired programmes have been active in 55 countries where these are operated with the support from numerous national and regional organisations and touch nearly 7 lakh young musicians through 400+ music centres.

This socio-music programme has created talented musicians hand in hand with dramatically changing the life trajectory of hundreds of thousands of Venezuela’s neediest kids. El Sistema’s mission is to promote the collective practice of music through symphony orchestras and choruses in order to help children and young people in achieving their full potential and acquiring values that favour their growth. It has offered the most vulnerable children a creative way out of their impoverished lives and a way to great concert halls to the most talented amongst them.

El Sistema Venezuela Legacy

El Sistema Venezuela has nurtured international musicians such as Edicson Ruiz, at one time, the youngest member in the history of the Berlin Philharmonic; Natalia Luis-Bassa, now conducting three English orchestras; flautist Pedro Eustache; violinists

Edward Pulgar and Joen Vasquez in addition to Gustavo Dudamel who now leads the Los Angeles Philharmonic. The institution also has ensembles like the Teresa Carreño Youth Orchestra, the Caracas Symphony Youth Orchestra and the world-renowned Simón Bolívar Orchestra to its name.

La educación musical

El Sistema’s approach to music education emphasizes intensive ensemble participation from the earliest stages, group learning, peer teaching and a commitment to keeping the joy and fun of musical learning and music making ever-present. These orchestral ensembles adapt well to a diversity of musical genres and origins.

Children begin attending an El Sistema centre called ‘nucleo’ as early as age 2 or 3 with the vast majority continuing well into their teens. Participation is free for all students who attend lessons up to six days a week, three to four hours a day, plus retreats and intensive workshops.

Kids of preschool age begin with work on body expressiveness and rhythm. Encouraging the children to keep their bodies active while playing (without losing technique) is a key feature of the programme in later years. At age 5, children pick up their first instruments, starting with the recorder and percussion. They also join a choir in order to build community through ensemble work. By age 7, all

2008 El Sistema movie showcases the lives of
three children from the La Rincondada núcleo
at Caracas in Venezuela

JOSÉ ANTONIO ABREU

GUSTAVO DUDAMEL

SIMÓN BOLÍVAR JUGENDORCHESTER

MITHER VON PAUL SHACZNY UND MARIA STODTMEIER

EL SISTEMA

ÜBER DIE MACHT DER MUSIK IN EINER WELT VON ARMUT UND GEWALT
DAS ANDERE GESICHT VENEZUELAS

Presseheft

NONAPOL PICTURES, in coproduction mit ELUDARTS MUSIC INTERNATIONAL, in Zusammenarbeit mit PAUL SHACZNY und MARIA STODTMEIER
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NUR IM KINO

www.el-sistema-film.com



Orchestrating Venezuela's Children

students can pick their first string or wind instrument. Kids can change instruments but are not encouraged to do so frivolously.

Learning takes place through three sources – Instruction, Performance, and the Environment.

Learning through Instruction

Early instruction includes singing and playing with the student's instrument, often focusing on a single note within a group song; this helps to develop a sense of quality sound. Learning how to use full standard notation often takes many years and is incorporated into their learning organically. There are three levels of practice every week: full ensemble work, section work and private lessons. Students often encounter the same teacher in both their group and personal lessons, thereby allowing the teacher-pupil interaction outcome to be enhanced.

Learning through Performing

Students play in front of audiences as much as possible. This reduces the pressure of formal performance, and allows performing to become a natural part of their musical life. From a young age, the students are exposed

to the variety of orchestras within the system, from the lowest level to the internationally successful Simón Bolívar Orchestra.

Learning through the Environment

El Sistema's primary focus is to create a daily haven of safety, joy and fun that builds every child's self-esteem and sense of value. Hard work and true achievement are crucial to the success of El Sistema. However, a feeling of fun is never forgotten. Students frequently watch their fellow students perform, allowing them to both see and be inspired by the accomplishments of their peers. Attendance is not an issue; the children want to be at their local nucleo for themselves, their teachers and their fellow students.

Teachers

The majority of El Sistema teachers and nucleo leaders are former students of the program. They understand both the social and musical mission of the program. By giving individual attention to each student, the teachers nurture both the individual person and the musician at the same time.

Curriculum

El Sistema the world over maintains a customised national curriculum, including

an established musical sequence. Most curricula give primary importance to their native musical tradition, yet the

appreciation of international classical musicology and techniques is also inculcated in most systems.

[Source: Official website of El Sistema USA, a national alliance of El Sistema-inspired programmes]

EL SISTEMA VENEZUELA: DOES REALITY MATCH THE RHETORIC?

An in-depth analysis by Dr Geoff Baker, an academic at Royal Holloway, University of London puts a big question mark on El Sistema, as practised in Venezuela. Excerpts from Dr Baker's article follow,

Stories of salvation and breathtaking musical performances have seized the popular imagination and elevated El Sistema into a global phenomenon. Inspired by these rosy images, I went to Venezuela in search of the programme's secret. But to my surprise, several Venezuelan musicians and cultural observers paint a picture of discrimination, nepotism, favouritism, bullying, poor pay and working conditions, strife between management and teachers, and exploitation of staff and children.

I found many Sistema musicians unconvinced by claims that the project was aimed at Venezuela's most vulnerable children. Pointing to a lack of mechanisms for consistently targeting this demographic, they suggested that most musicians came

from the middle levels of society. Contrary to popular belief, El Sistema did not begin life as a social program, and the social benefits attributed to it, such as inclusion and teamwork are harder to detect than authoritarianism and competition. Widely portrayed as a revolutionary social project, El Sistema in fact echoes distinctly tarnished traditional "drills and skills" program: hierarchical, teacher-centred, and focused on repetitive learning and performance.

How is all this so effectively hidden from the outside world? Partly, because for foreign observers are too easily seduced by the spectacles laid on for their benefit by the organisation's slick PR department. Also founder José Antonio Abreu, an ex-politician, is a vastly powerful figure in the country.

This controversy is being presented here with the intent to say that the apparently corrupt El Sistema Venezuela has in the last four decades managed to inspire countries like the US, the UK, France, Canada, Italy and Denmark to replicate the music education model that is reaping 100% results for their children and therefore remains a globally successful phenomena in nations that have invested into it honestly.

An orchestra is as good as its conductor. Likewise, an education system is just as good as its pedagogues.

If sharks were people...

If sharks were people...

Bertolt Brecht

“If sharks were people,” his landlady’s little daughter asked Mr. K, “would they be nicer to the little fish?”

“Of course,” he said, “if sharks were people, they would have strong boxes built in the sea for little fish. There they would put in all sorts of food plants and little animals, too. They would see to it that the boxes always had fresh water, and they would take absolutely every sort of sanitary measure. When, for example, a little fish would injure his fin, it would be immediately bandaged so that he would not die on the sharks before his time had come. In order that the little fish would never be sad, there would be big water parties from time to time; for happy fish taste better than sad ones.”

“Of course, there would be schools in the big boxes as well. There the little fish would learn how to swim into the mouths of the sharks. They would need, for example, geography so that they could

find the sharks, lazing around somewhere. The main subject would naturally be the moral education of the little fish. They would be taught that the grandest, most beautiful thing is for a little fish to offer himself happily, and that they must all believe in the sharks, above all when they say that they will provide for a beautiful future. One would let the little fish know that this future is only assured when they learn obedience...”

“If sharks were people, there would of course be arts as well. There would be beautiful pictures of sharks’ teeth, all in magnificent colours, of their mouths and throats as pure playgrounds where one can tumble and play. The theatres on the bottom of the sea would offer plays showing heroic little fish swimming enthusiastically down the throats of the sharks...”

“There would certainly be religion. It would teach that true life begins in the sharks’ bellies... In short, there could only be culture in the sea if sharks were people.”

[Excerpts from Kalendergeschichten (translates: Calendar Stories), a literary collection of Deutsch verse and prose first published in 1949. Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) was an influential German playwright and poet of the 20th century.]

The Element

Ken Robinson

Gillian was only eight years old, but her future was already at risk. Her schoolwork was a disaster, at least as far as her teachers were concerned. She turned in assignments late, her handwriting was terrible, and she tested poorly. Not only that, she was a disruption to the entire class, one minute fidgeting noisily, the next staring out the window, and the next doing something to disturb the other children around her. Gillian wasn't particularly concerned about any of this—she was used to being corrected by authority figures and really didn't see herself as a difficult child—but the school was very concerned.

The school thought that Gillian had a learning disorder of some sort and that it might be more appropriate for her to be in a school for children with special needs. All of this took place in the 1930s. I think now they'd say she had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and they'd put her on Ritalin or something similar. But the ADHD epidemic hadn't been invented at the time. It wasn't an available condition.

People didn't know they could have that and had to get by without it.

Gillian's parents received the letter from the school with great concern and sprang to action. Gillian's mother put her daughter in her best dress and shoes, and took her to a psychologist for assessment, fearing the worst. Gillian told me that she remembers being invited into a large oak-paneled room with leather-bound books on the shelves. Standing in the room next to a large desk was an imposing man who sat her down on a huge leather sofa. Nervous about the impression she would make, Gillian sat on her hands so that she wouldn't fidget.

The psychologist went back to his desk, and for the next twenty minutes, he asked Gillian's mother about the difficulties Gillian was having at school. While he didn't direct any of his questions at Gillian, he watched her carefully the entire time. This made Gillian extremely uneasy and confused. Even at this tender age, she knew that this man would have a significant role in her life. She knew what it meant to attend a "special school," and she didn't want anything to do with that. She genuinely didn't feel that she had any real problems, but everyone else seemed to believe she did. Given the way her mother answered the questions, it was possible that even she felt this way.

Maybe, Gillian thought, they were right.

Eventually, Gillian's mother and the psychologist stopped talking. The man rose from his desk, walked to the sofa, and sat next to the little girl.

"Gillian, you've been very patient, and I thank you for that," he said. "But I'm afraid you'll have to be patient for a little longer. I need to speak to your mother privately now. We're going to go out of the room for a few minutes. Don't worry; we won't be very long."

Gillian nodded apprehensively, and the two adults left her sitting there on her own. But as he was leaving the room, the psychologist leaned across his desk and turned on the radio.

As soon as they were in the corridor outside the room, the doctor said to Gillian's mother, "Just stand here for a moment, and watch what she does." Nearly immediately,

The Element

Gillian was on her feet, moving around the room to the music. The two adults stood watching quietly for a few minutes, transfixed by the girl's grace. Anyone would have noticed there was something natural—about Gillian's movements.

At last, the psychologist turned to Gillian's mother and said, "You know, Mrs. Lynne, Gillian isn't sick. She's a dancer. Take her to a dance school."

Gillian's mother did exactly what the psychiatrist suggested. Gillian started going to the dance school. She went on to join the Royal Ballet Company, becoming a soloist and performing all over the world. Eventually she formed her own musical theater company and created with Andrew Lloyd Webber some of the most successful musical theater productions in history, including *Cats* and *The Phantom of the Opera*.

Little Gillian, the girl with the high-risk future, became known to the world as Gillian Lynne, one of the most accomplished choreographers of our time, someone who has brought pleasure to millions and earned millions of dollars. This happened because someone looked deep into her eyes—someone who had seen children like her before and knew how to read the signs. Someone else might have put her on medication and told her to calm down. But Gillian wasn't a problem child. She didn't need to go away to a special school. She just needed to be who she really was.

Numerous Stories, One Message

Gillian Lynne's story may differ from other "epiphany stories" a great deal. What unites them is one undeniably powerful message: all these people found high levels of achievement and personal

satisfaction upon discovering the thing that they naturally do well and that also ignites their passions. They have discovered their Element—the place where the things you love to do and the things that you are good at come together. The Element is a different way of defining our potential. It manifests itself differently in every person, but the components of the Element are universal.

Gillian Lynne, Matt Groening, Paul Samuelson, Paul McCartney and numerous others have accomplished a great deal in their lives. But they are not alone in being capable of that. Why they are special is that they have found what they love to do and they are actually doing it. They have found their Element.

In my experience, most people have not.

Finding your Element is essential to your well-being and ultimate success, and, by implication, to the health of our organizations and the effectiveness of our educational systems.

Being in our Element depends on finding our own distinctive talents and passions. Why haven't most people found this? One of the most important reasons is that most people have a very limited conception of their own natural capacities. The first limitation is in our understanding of the range of our capacities—of our own powers. The second limitation is in our understanding of how all of these capacities relate to each other holistically. The third limitation is in our understanding of how much potential we have for growth and change. This limited view of our own capacities can be compounded by our peer groups, by our culture, and by our own expectations of ourselves. A major factor for everyone, though, is education.

One Size Does Not Fit All

Some of the most brilliant, creative people I know did not do well at school. Many of them didn't really discover what they could do—and who they really were—until they'd left school and recovered from their education!

Paul McCartney went through his entire education at the Liverpool Institute without anyone noticing that he had any musical talent at all. He even applied to join the choir of Liverpool Cathedral and was turned down. They said he wasn't a good enough singer. Really? How good was that choir? How good can a choir be? Ironically, the very choir that rejected the young McCartney ultimately staged two of his classical Beatles pieces.

McCartney is not alone in having his talents overlooked in school. Apparently, organizers kept Elvis Presley from joining his school's glee club. They said his voice would ruin their sound. Like the choir at the Liverpool Cathedral, the glee club had standards to uphold. We all know the tremendous heights the glee club scaled once they'd managed to keep Elvis out.

I've worked for most of my life in and around education, and I don't believe that this is the fault of individual teachers. Obviously, some should be doing something else, and as far away from young minds as possible. But there are plenty of good teachers and many brilliant ones.

Most of us can look back to particular teachers who inspired us and changed our lives. These teachers excelled and reached us, but they did this in spite of the basic culture and mindset of public education.

There are significant problems with that culture, and I don't see nearly enough improvements. In many systems, the

problems are getting worse. This is true just about everywhere.

In many ways, the education system in the United States is very similar to that in the United Kingdom, and in most other places in the world. Three features stand out in particular. First, there is the preoccupation with certain sorts of academic ability. Important as the skills of critical analysis and reasoning, particularly with words and numbers are, there is much more to human intelligence than that.

The second feature is the hierarchy of subjects. At the top of the hierarchy are mathematics, science, and language skills. In the middle are the humanities. At the bottom are the arts. In the arts, there is another hierarchy: music and visual arts normally have a higher status than theater and dance. The third feature is the growing reliance on particular types of assessment. Children everywhere are under intense pressure to perform at higher and higher levels on a narrow range of standardized tests.

Why are school systems like this? The reasons are cultural and historical. Most systems of mass education came into being relatively recently—in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These systems were designed to meet the economic interests of those times—times that were dominated by the Industrial Revolution in Europe and America. Math, science, and language skills were essential for jobs in the industrial economies. The other big influence on education has been the academic culture of universities, which has tended to push aside any sort of activity that involves the heart, the body, the senses, and a good portion of our actual brains.

The result is that school systems everywhere inculcate us with a very narrow view of intelligence and capacity

The Element

and overvalue particular sorts of talent and ability. In doing so, they neglect others that are just as important, and they disregard the relationships between them in sustaining the vitality of our lives and communities. This stratified, one-size-fits-all approach to education marginalizes all of those who do not take naturally to learning this way.

When they are very young, kids aren't particularly worried about being wrong. If they aren't sure what to do in a particular situation, they'll just have a go at it and see how things turn out. This is not to suggest that being wrong is the same thing as being creative. Sometimes being wrong is just being wrong. What is true is that if you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original.

Most students never get to explore the full range of their abilities and interests. Those students whose minds work differently—and we're talking about many students here; perhaps even the majority of them—can feel alienated from the whole culture of education. This is exactly why some of the most successful people you'll ever meet didn't do well at school. Education is the system that's supposed to develop our natural abilities and enable us to make our way in the world. Instead, it is stifling the individual talents and abilities of too many students and killing their motivation to learn.

The Pace of Change

Children starting school this year will be retiring in 2070. No one has any idea of what the world will look like in ten years' time, let alone in 2070. There are two major drivers of change—technology and demography.

Technology, especially digital technology, is developing at a rate that most people

cannot properly grasp. It is also contributing to what some pundits are calling the biggest generation gap since rock and roll. People over the age of thirty were born before the digital revolution really started. We've learned to use digital technology—laptops, cameras, the Internet—as adults, and it has been something like learning a foreign language. Most of us are okay, and some are even expert. We do e-mails and PowerPoint, surf the Internet, and feel we're at the cutting edge. But compared to most people under thirty and certainly under twenty, we are fumbling amateurs. People of that age were born after the digital revolution began. They learned to speak digital as a mother tongue.

Younger children who are growing up with even more sophisticated technologies are already outperforming teenagers of this generation. And this revolution is not over. In fact, it's barely begun. Some suggest that, in the near future, the power of laptop computers will match the computing power of the human brain. Before too long we may see the merging of information systems with human consciousness. If you think about the impact in the last twenty years of relatively simple digital technologies on the work we do and how we do it—and the impact these technologies have had on national economies—think of the changes that lie ahead. Don't worry if you can't predict them: nobody can.

Add to this the impact of population growth. The world population has doubled in the past thirty years, from three to six billion. It may be heading for nine billion by the middle of the century. This great new mass of humanity will be using technologies that have yet to be invented in ways we cannot imagine and in jobs that don't yet exist.

These driving cultural and technological forces are producing profound shifts

in the world economies and increasing diversity and complexity in our daily lives, and especially in those of young people. The simple fact is that these are times of unprecedented global change. We can identify trends for the future, but accurate predictions are almost impossible.

No other period in human history could match the present one in the sheer scale, speed, and global complexity of the changes and challenges we face. And the changes are accelerating. Certain trends indicate that China, Russia, India, Brazil, and others will play an ever more dominant role in the world economy. We know that the population will continue to grow at unprecedented levels. We know that technology will open new frontiers, and that these technologies will manifest in our homes and our offices with stunning velocity. With more countries and more people in the game than ever before, and with emerging technology changing the game itself as we speak—leads us to one inescapable conclusion: we can't know what the future will be like.

The only way to prepare for the future is to make the most out of ourselves on the assumption that doing so will make us as flexible and productive as possible. It's very possible that our children will have multiple careers over the course of their working lives, not simply multiple jobs. Many of them will certainly have jobs we haven't conceived yet. When the only thing we know about the future is that it will be different, isn't it our obligation to encourage them to explore as many avenues as possible with an eye toward discovering their true talents and their true passions?

What Is the Element?

The Element is the meeting point between natural aptitude and personal passion. People

who have found their Element are the ones who are doing the thing they love, and in doing it they feel like their most authentic selves. They find that time passes differently and that they are more alive, more centered, and more vibrant than at any other times. Being in their Element takes them beyond the ordinary experiences of enjoyment or happiness. When people are in their Element, they connect with something fundamental to their sense of identity, purpose, and well-being. Being there provides a sense of self-revelation, of defining who they really are and what they're really meant to be doing with their lives. This is why many of the people in the book describe finding their Element as an epiphany.

How do we find the Element in ourselves and in others? There isn't a rigid formula. The Element is different for everyone. In fact, that's the point. We aren't limited to one Element, by the way. Some people may feel a similar passion for one or more activities and may be equally good at them. Others may have a singular passion and aptitude that fulfills them far more than anything else does. There's no rule about this. But there are, so to speak, elements of the Element.

The Element has two main features, and there are two conditions for being in it. The features are aptitude and passion. The conditions are attitude and opportunity. The sequence goes something like this: I get it; I love it; I want it; Where is it?

I Get It

An aptitude is a natural facility for something. It is an intuitive feel or a grasp of what that thing is, how it works, and how to use it. Gillian Lynne has a natural feel for dance, Paul McCartney for music, and Paul Samuelson for economics and math. Our aptitudes are highly personal. Finding and developing our creative strengths is an

The Element

essential part of becoming who we really are. We don't know who we can be until we know what we can do.

I Love It

Being in your Element is not only a question of natural aptitude. I know many people who are naturally very good at something, but don't feel that it's their life's calling. Being in your Element needs something more—passion. People who are in their Element take a deep delight and pleasure in what they do.

Years ago, I told an extremely talented keyboard player named Charles how well I thought he'd played. Then I said that I'd love to be able to play keyboards that well. "No, you wouldn't," he responded.

Taken aback, I insisted that I really would. "No," he said. "You mean you like the idea of playing keyboards. If you'd love to play them, you'd be doing it."

He said that to play as well he did, he practised every day for three or four hours in addition to performing. He'd been doing that since he was seven. Suddenly playing keyboards as well as Charles did didn't seem as appealing. I asked him how he kept up that level of discipline. He said, "Because I love it." He couldn't imagine doing anything else.

I Want It

Attitude is our personal perspective on our selves and our circumstances—our angle on things, our disposition, and emotional point of view. Many things affect our attitudes, including our basic character,

our spirit, our sense of self-worth, the perceptions of those around us, and their expectations of us. An interesting indicator of our basic attitude is how we think of the role of luck in our lives.

People who love what they do often describe themselves as lucky. People who think they're not successful in their lives often say they've been unlucky. Accidents and randomness play some part in everybody's lives. But there's more to luck than pure chance. High achievers often share similar attitudes, such as perseverance, self-belief, optimism, ambition, and frustration. How we perceive our circumstances and how we create and take opportunities depends largely on what we expect of ourselves.

Where Is It?

Without the right opportunities, you may never know what your aptitudes are or how far they might take you. There aren't many bronco riders in the Antarctic, or many pearl divers in the Sahara Desert.

Aptitudes don't necessarily become obvious unless there are opportunities to use them. The implication, of course, is that we may never discover our true Element. A lot depends on the opportunities we have, on the opportunities we create, and how and if we take them.

Being in your Element often means being connected with other people who share the same passions and have a common sense of commitment. In practice, this means actively seeking opportunities to explore your aptitude in different fields.

Often we need other people to help us recognize our real talents. Often we can help other people to discover theirs. My goal is to illuminate for you concepts that you might have sensed intuitively and to inspire you to find the Element for yourself and to help others to find it as well. What I hope you will find here is a new way of looking at your own potential and the potential of those around you.

Sir Ken Robinson is an author, speaker and education visionary with over three decades of experience as an educator and international advisor on education in the arts. He is the recipient of the prestigious Benjamin Franklin Medal and Knight Bachelor honour for exemplary services to the arts. Sir Robinson is the most watched speaker on TED talks and is devoted to prevent educating people out of their creativity. He has made it his mission to emphasise on the need for education to foster diversity curiosity and creativity through his books and lectures.

[Excerpts from the book 'The Element: How finding your passion changes everything' coauthored by Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica and published in 2009 by Penguin.]

Day Dreams

Day Dreams

Gijubhai Bhadeka

I anxiously waited for the school to begin. I was excited to put my new plan into practice: to make classroom teaching interesting and win over my

pupils. My heart was full of excitement and I could feel my pulse throbbing.

As the bell rang, boys entered their classes. The headmaster introduced me to the students. I looked at the children who were to be with me for the next twelve months. I could see some of them smiling, some winking at each other and few nodded stiffly. One or two stared at me in surprise and the rest stood looking totally unconcerned. One look at the class confirmed this was a mischievous lot! Never worry, they'll come around, I told myself.

I returned home a little dejected.

The task seemed a bit difficult. In fact, it's going to be a really tough test. Well, no matter! I am not going to give up. I should have known one doesn't play by the game of silence in this manner. In Montessori school a lot of preparatory work is done before the game is taken up. I was a fool to take it up on my very first day! I should have got to know my pupils and established a rapport with them. These boys do not like the school and they want holidays! It is no easy task to work with them.'

I prepared a plan of work for the next day and went to bed. I passed the night dreaming of the day's happenings and the next day's work.

Next day in class the boys crowded around me: "Sir, why not have a holiday today?... Sir, a day off today... Please, Sir!"

All right," I said. "I will let you off today but not for the whole day only for two hours. However, you will first listen to a

p d s i M

जब तक बालक घरों में मार खाते हैं,
और विद्यालयों में गालियाँ खाते हैं,
तब तक मुझे चैन कैसे पड़े?
जब तक बालकों के लिए पाठशालाएँ,
बाग-बगीचे और क्रीडागण न बनें,
तब तक मुझे चैन कैसे पड़े?
जब तक बालकों को प्रेम
और सम्मान न मिले,
तब तक मुझे चैन कैसे पड़े?

गिजुभाई बधेका

n q e u

'सो जाओ नहीं तो बुद्धाबाबा उठा के ले जायेगा'
'खा लो नहीं तो चोर पकड़ के ले जायेंगे'
'शेर आ जायेगा'
'भूत आ जायेगा'
'पुलिसवाला आ जायेगा'
'चुप हो जाओ नहीं तो तुम्हे कोठरी में बंद कर देंगे'
'पढ़ाई करो नहीं तो धुन के पिटोगे'
जो बालकों को ऐसे डरावें, वे बालकों के दुश्मन हैं

गिजुभाई बधेका



story that I am going to tell you. We shall discuss other matters afterwards.”

I began my story: “Once there was a king. He had seven queens. Each queen had a prince and a princess...Each of the seven princess had a palace of her own. There were, in the garden of each palace, seven trees of pearls...”

The boys listened with rapt attention. The whole class was quiet not a sound or movement anywhere. The headmaster was surprised with an absolute silence and came to the class to find what the matter was!

He asked me, “Are you telling a story?” “Yes,” I replied, “a story, and a new kind of game of silence.”

As the headmaster left, I continued with the story. There was some noise in the neighbouring class. I drew the pupils’ attention to it. “See how this noise disturbs us!” All the boys agreed.

My plan was working; I smiled and picked up the thread. Halfway through the story I stopped and offered, “If you want a holiday, we shall stop here now. If not, we may continue with the story.”

“Please continue the story ; we don’t want the day off,” they answered – everyone of them.

My first day plan was a success. I continued with the same plan for few days. As their interest in listening to stories increased, I started thinking of making a classroom library. They were in Standard Four and it was the right time to make them read books.

When the class demanded a story the next time I said, “ Well, I have told you all the stories I knew. I don’t know anymore. Isn’t it silly, that we have a class of 50 children and all of us have the same set of books! There could be nothing more foolish than that! So don’t buy any textbooks this year . Instead, give me the money and I will buy three different story books / picture books for each one of you. So, instead of 3 stupid textbooks you will have 150 interesting story books.”

But the next day, one of the boys came with the textbooks for language and history “My father had bought them for me right on the day our results were declared,” he said. Another boy said, “I have also brought the books. They were my elder



brother's books." A third boy said, "I am not going to buy books here. My uncle is going to send them to me from Bombay." Yet another one said, "My father refuses to give money to me. He says he will buy the textbooks for me."

Bowled over, I realised that setting up a library was quite easy to imagine. Doing it is quite another thing! Some boys had brought money. I accepted the money from them and gave them receipts. Next day, the boys came asking for their textbooks.

I said, "I have bought these story books from the money collected from you. You had said that you would like to read stories, so I have bought story books." The boys were happy to see the illustrated books with colourful jackets. There was a scramble for the books.

"Look here," I said. "We have at present only fifteen books. Fifteen boys will be able

to read. The remaining twenty will come to me and hear what I read."

"As soon as a boy finishes reading a book, he should return it to my table and should pick up another one which may be there. In this way, every one of you will be able to read all the books." I said.

I called the others to my table and began 'model reading' from a story book. I read with proper modulation of voice and proper accent. The boys learnt to lower their voices so as to not disturb others; they had not learnt silent reading till then. They kept their voices low for a while and then lapsed into loud reading! The 'model reading' went on. The story was specially chosen. All the children listened with interest. They read on their own with even more concentration. This was only the beginning of the fulfilment of my dream. I had to continue with the efforts.

[Excerpts from Gijubhai Badheka's memoirs, Divaswapna]

Nicknamed as 'Moochali Maa' (Marathi for 'mother with a moustache'), Gijubhai Badheka was a visionary teacher who introduced numerous out-of-the-box pedagogical techniques in Bhavnagar, that too as early as the 1930s! With no support from the management, or for that matter, from the World Bank or the EU, he set up a classroom library with the children's own resources. Gijubhai had a penchant for converting all dull curricular components into games. He took the children out for field visits to develop their sensitivity towards nature—much before 'environmental education' became a catchword!

The Waldorf Way

When children relate what they learn to their own experience, they are interested and alive, and what they learn becomes their own. Waldorf schools are designed to foster this kind of learning.

Anthroposophy is derived by the amalgamation of two Greek words: anthropos + sophia that mean 'of humans' and 'wisdom', respectively. It is in the pre world war era that an Austrian humanist Rudolf Steiner thought of amalgamating science and spirituality to create an educational philosophy that aims to direct learning at inner development of the pupil through personal experiences, which form the building blocks of the child's unique perspective on the world around. The first school based upon Steiner's ideas was opened in 1919 for the children of employees serving in the Waldorf-Astoria Cigarette Company in Stuttgart, Germany. This is the source of the name 'Waldorf', which today has become synonymous with Steiner's ideology and is trademarked the world over.

Waldorf or Rudolf Steiner education is based on an anthroposophical view and understanding of the human being, that is, as a being of body, soul and spirit. The education mirrors the basic stages of a child's development from childhood to adulthood, which in general reflects the development of humanity through history from our origin, far back in past times up to the present.

When you enter a Waldorf school, the first thing you may notice is the care given to the building. Evidence of student involvement with the natural environment is to be found in every nook and cranny of the campus. What strikes you next is the enthusiasm and commitment of the teachers you meet. Teachers in Waldorf schools are dedicated to generating an inner enthusiasm for learning within every child. These teachers are interested in the students as individuals. They achieve this in a variety of ways. Even seemingly dry and academic subjects are presented from a dynamic perspective which gives foremost importance to the individual student's views. This eliminates the need for competitive testing, academic placement, and behavioristic rewards to motivate learning. It allows motivation to arise from within and helps engender the capacity for joyful lifelong learning.

An Ascending Spiral of Knowledge

In the Waldorf grades, each subject studied should contribute to the development of a well-balanced individual. The purpose of studying a subject is not to make a student into a professional mathematician, historian, or biologist, but to awaken and educate capacities that every human being needs. Naturally, one student is more gifted in math and another in science or history, but the mathematician needs the humanities, and the historian needs math and science. The choice of a vocation is left to the free decision of the adult, but one's early education should give one a palette of experience from which to choose the particular colours that one's interests, capacities, and life circumstances allow. The older students pursue special projects and elective subjects and activities, nevertheless, the goal remains: holistic development unique to the individual.

If the ascending spiral of the curriculum offers a "vertical integration" from year to year, an equally important "horizontal integration" enables students to engage the full range of their faculties at every stage of development. The arts and practical skills play an essential part in the educational process throughout the grades. They are



Children of class III from Tridha on a farm trip to learn about growing plants

not considered luxuries, but fundamental to human growth and development.

Tridha: An Evolution in Education

Tridha, Mumbai is one of the many schools based on the Steiner philosophy of education that are believed to be 'doing it right', being secular, co-educational and non-selective – and actually meaning it of course. Based on a more humanistic approach to learning, the school does not believe that quick mugging and spewing

will get you very far in life. Rather, they believe in holistic teaching which ensures that music and art layer more theoretical subjects like science and math to help children reach 'a deeper understanding of relative concepts'. They then go on to provide them with daily hands-on experience and believe that 'it's an equation that's clearly paying off'. At the end of their schooling, all students are geared towards the IGCSE examination, but their method of getting there is different to most others who are doing the same.

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